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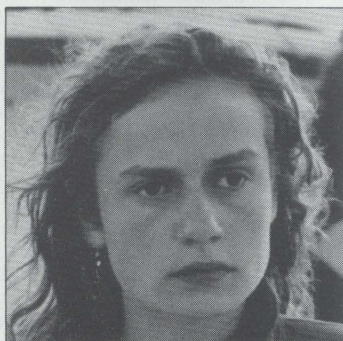
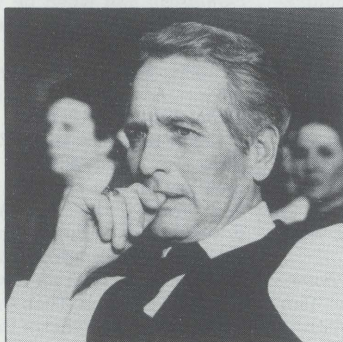
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On the cover: *The Day of the Dead*, 'Under the Volcano'.
 Photo: François Duhamel.

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Raúl

Sheheruizade, or 1001 Films

In SIGHT AND SOUND Winter 1981-82 an article of mine was published chronicling the career of Raúl Ruiz from its nebulous Chilean origins to his then current film, *The Territory* (a production with which I myself had been involved). In the thirty or so succeeding months he has completed no fewer than seven features, as well as God knows (for I doubt even Ruiz does) how many shorts, mostly commissions from television. Specialised journals have devoted entire issues to his work. Retrospectives abound. Rare is the festival these days which cannot boast 'its' Ruiz. He himself was recently compelled to have his telephone number purged from the Paris directory, so frequent had become the calls from young admirers eager to work with him in any capacity whatsoever.

In the Spring issue of this magazine, reporting from the Rotterdam Festival, Jonathan Rosenbaum claimed that, like Godard and Rivette in the 60s and 70s, Ruiz 'can simply do no wrong'. That is a perilously hubristic attitude for any critic to adopt (and, for some of us, it does not honestly apply to either Godard or Rivette in their respective heydays), but I know what he means. There now exists a Ruiz-effect, a Ruiz-system, a Ruiz-myth. As an artist, he has become subject to what could be described as the Law of Increasing Returns, to the point where, were he to append his signature to a frying-pan, let's say, it would oblige us to revise our perception both of the utensil itself and of Ruiz's career—and perhaps of the world...

The ambition of this article is not to explore that myth, merely to propose, film by film, an interim report on one of the cinema's most amazing creators: a director who tells stories, like Sheherazade, as though his life depended upon it; whose existence seems to consist of a perpetual shoot (on his alluding to a film of which I had not previously heard mention, *Bérénice*, I asked him when he had made it. 'Oh—last week,' came the airily superb reply); each of whose works might be defined as a UFO (Unidentified Filmic Object); and whose credo ought to be, not Art For Art's Sake, but Art For Art's Pleasure. A brief account of a film-maker as complex and legendarily prolific as Raúl Ruiz is something of a challenge: hence the rather graceless telegraphic prose style.

Le Toit de la baleine (*The Roof of the Whale*). About an ethnologist confronted in Patagonia for



Raúl Ruiz (standing, right) and his unit filming *Point de Fuite*.

which an island near Rotterdam makes a quite convincing substitute) with a pair of laconic Indian tribe. Not only a parody of anthropology, but a playful, multilingual analysis of language: the tribesmen's own dialect apparently consists of a single word, 'Yamasgutan', which therefore means *everything*. Its (for Ruiz) oddly Northern and misty visuals—recalling sometimes Murnau, sometimes Turner—confirm his practice of rehabilitating Méliès-invented *truquages* and various cinematic devices fallen into disuse. The liberty of the narrative is that, infinite and terminal, of a labyrinth.

Les Trois Couronnes du matelot (*The Three Crowns of the Sailor*). A breakthrough film for Ruiz, which enjoyed a huge *succès d'estime* in Paris. Think of Coleridge, Dinesen, Andersen, Stevenson, Selma Lagerlöf and the Welles of *The Lady from Shanghai*, *Mr Arkadin* and *The Immortal Story*. Yet, as always, a heroically inexpensive production, since Ruiz 'pays' his technicians by offering even the most minor among them an opportunity to participate directly in a number of complicated visual exploits. As a rehabilitation of wide-angle, deep-focus cinematography—a characteristic shot of a roll being buttered in startling close-up while the action unfolds in the depths of the frame genuinely prompts one to re-think film history—its virtuosity is breathtaking. (Not one camera angle is ever repeated.) It's possible to yearn on occasion, however, for a perfectly ordinary shot, even a stupid shot, some

dumb *champ-contre-champ*, for example.

La Ville des pirates (*The City of the Pirates*). A cross between *Pandora and the Flying Dutchman* and the Buñuel and Dali of *L'Age d'Or*. Here the cinema virtually renounces its role as a recording medium. Nevertheless, in spite of the endlessly shifting filters, reverse photography, visual tricks, etc, there remains an *image de base* (contrary to the technological jigsaw puzzles of Hollywood science-fiction), therefore an effect of reality. A 'double-bill' of two discrete narratives, concerning a cherubic infant killer and a neurotic Norman Bates-like loner: when, as the second plot develops, one has all but forgotten the first, it brusquely re-surfaces. The colour is the closest I have ever seen to 40s Kalmus Technicolor, as though nature itself had been made-up.

Point de fuite (*Vanishing Point*). Made in approximately four days—possibly to demonstrate that a film like Wenders' *The State of Things* (which it resembles and for which the cast and crew of *The Territory* were 'borrowed') did not require a two-month shoot. Ruiz is the only director in the world capable of 'devising' what is usually thought of as unintentional humour, the sanest response to this meandering study of three outcasts stranded in a windswept resort being a kind of glazed amusement. One does not watch this film, one stares at it. No virtuosity here: instead a real orgy of *champs-contre-champs*.

Bérénice. Racine's five-act tragedy, faithfully transposed, and featuring Anne Alvaro as a

sumptuous Bérénice in a gown that, even in black and white, one somehow *knows* to be red. (I checked: it was.) Except for his subject-matter, Ruiz has never really ceased to be a Third World film-maker, for whom the Aristotelian unities respected by Racine constitute just another low-budget, B-movie parameter. What makes the experience unique, however, is that the male characters are all left in shadow (a technique which Ruiz first experimented with in his short *Ombres chinoises*); and when he worried that the result might appear too systematic, he filmed them straight but blacked up their faces. A 'silent' talkie, an astonishing *tour de force*.

I have not yet seen *La Présence réelle*, a semi-fictional documentary on the theatre, shot in and around the last Avignon Festival; and, as I write, Ruiz is in the process of editing *Manoel et l'île des merveilles*, an adventure movie for children. Then there are his innumerable shorts (notably, a filmic 'palindrome', which can be projected in either direction) and equally innumerable projects, which include *Madame Bovary* with Bulle Ogier; a futuristic *Treasure Island*; and *Dans un miroir*, an adaptation of Louis-René des Forêts' strange and claustrophobic novella. (To its author's surprise, the film version will start with a hurricane sweeping the East Coast of America, then traversing the Atlantic, then the North of France, then Paris, until it eventually fetches up at the front door of the house in which the action takes place.) These, I should add, are his projects for *this* year.

GILBERT ADAIR

The bargee's tale

A Paris 'construction'

Every silent film shown in public these days seems to have been 'reconstructed'. Usually all this means is that a new print has been struck. The true reconstructions—such as those done in Munich by Enno Patalas—are thus diminished. It is encouraging then to be able to describe an event of unique importance. Not so much reconstruction as construction. On 12 and 13 March 1984, the Cinémathèque Française presented *L'Hirondelle et la Mésange* (*The Swallow and the Bluetit*) at their theatre in the Palais de Chaillot, Paris, with live orchestral accompaniment.

The picture was shot in 1920 but never completed. The director, the great theatrical producer André Antoine, went off it seems with his crew and a scenario and shot a film which turned out to be more a documentary than a drama. The distributors, Pathé, groaned when they saw how uncommercial it was. They asked for more blood and thunder—a police raid perhaps?—and when Antoine refused decided not to release it. The cutting copy was lost, but the rushes—six hours of them—were found in their original negative form in the vaults of the Cinémathèque. The former director of the Cinémathèque, André-Marc Delocque-Fourcaud, commissioned Henri Colpi to edit the rushes and to produce a final print. Philippe Esnault acted as historical adviser.

Henri Colpi is among the most distinguished film editors in France. He cut *Hiroshima*, *Mon Amour* and *Last Year at Marienbad*, and directed such films as *Une Aussi Longue Absence*. On comparing the rushes with the scenario, he realised that scenes had been written but not filmed, and scenes shot which were not in the script. So he travelled the same route along the Belgian and French canals—'by car, not by barge, alas!'—checking the locations.

Colpi took nine weeks to edit the film. At the Palais de Chaillot, I was so carried along by the momentum of the picture that I did not scrutinise his work critically, which proves how successful he was. I was aware of the odd cut, perhaps one from mid-shot to close-up before a title which might itself have disguised the cut in 1920, but there was little attempt to be modern. Colpi said he held the shots 'on the rhythm of the epoch'. When he viewed the surviving films of Antoine, he saw to his satisfaction that their editing style, albeit

primitive, somewhat matched his own. He always liked to cut before characters left the frame, and so did Antoine.

From 23 reels of rushes, Colpi produced an ideal 79 minutes (at 18 fps). Despite the existence of the scenario and title list, some shots baffled him. Only by a process of elimination, identifying, for example, a slight alteration to the costume of an actor, could he gradually work them into the body of the picture. One or two moments evidently remained to be shot. But Colpi has concealed their absence with fine editorial sleight of hand.

This precursor of *L'Atalante* contains characters so convincingly played that you can hardly believe they are actors, and the story itself has a deceptive charm. 'L'Hirondelle' and 'La Mésange' are bargees which, lashed together, ply the canals of Belgium and France. Their task is to carry building material to areas devastated by the war. On the vessel live Pieter van Groot (Ravet), a tough old bargee, his wife Griet (Maylianes) and Marthe (Maguy Delyac), Griet's younger sister. Like all good bargees, van Groot has a sideline in contraband, and the women do their bit to help. Already the film sounds more dramatic than it is. Slipping along the canals, we pick up these facts in between riveting shots of ancient towns and even older landscapes. Some of the film gives one the impression of sailing through a seventeenth century Dutch painting.

Van Groot takes on a pilot, Michel (Alcover), not realising that he has witnessed a contraband deal. They get on well, although Michel reserves his true affection for Marthe. Griet retains a coldness that neither Michel nor van Groot can understand. One day, however, her feelings for him become apparent; she seems to offer an invitation. But Michel misjudges his timing and his approach is too clumsy and violent. Only the sudden return of the others prevents what might have ended in rape. Griet tells her husband, and van Groot's first reaction is to beat the man up. But Griet warns him that Michel knows where the contraband diamonds are hidden.

Not realising how much he knows, Michel takes van Groot ashore for a drink and gets him thoroughly drunk. Or so he thinks. But when he runs back to the barge through the night, he doesn't realise that van Groot is shadowing him. Michel clammers down the rudder to retrieve the casket of diamonds. In a fury, van Groot calls out to him. Michel clammers back but is thrown overboard and jammed underwater with a pole. Griet is the only witness. Marthe is asleep. The bargees charge away over the gentle

waters which conceal their secret.

According to Colpi and Esnault, Antoine would rehearse his players intensively, but he was not extravagant with film. There was one take only on the documentary material. There were never more than two on any acted scenes, except once when there were three. Antoine used two cameras; the chief cameraman was René Guychard, but Léonce-Henry Burel, fresh from Gance's *La Roue*, helped out as an uncredited second.

The weather was not kind, even though it was summer. In some locations, such as narrow streets, the cameramen can hardly get an exposure. But the fact that the action takes place under grey skies and on often misty waters helps the emotional effect. Some of the shots, with their dark foregrounds, reminded me of Maurice Tourneur—hardly a coincidence since Tourneur, in his theatrical days, was a protégé of Antoine (as was, later, Julien Duvivier).

There are few interiors, and the interior lighting could not be simpler. Yet it is strikingly daring. By using just one light to duplicate the glow of an oil lamp, Guychard (or was it Burel?) worked against the Hollywood style. In some shots in a bar, the faces are black under the bargees' peaked caps. Below deck in the cabin, the same technique creates an erotic effect, as when Griet slowly wraps yards of contraband lace around her naked body.

Antoine filmed in Antwerp a festival which occurred once every 25 years. It proved to be the last, since 25 years on was 1945, and it has not been revived since. The fish market at Tamise no longer exists either, since the river is so badly polluted. Thanks to its fascination with the area and the people, the film's value has increased. Like fine wine, it has matured in its vault.

In an era when road pictures are popular, this pastorate of the canals should find an appreciative audience. The 'reconstruction' has been impeccably done; the print is outstanding, printed throughout on colour stock which faithfully preserves the black and white but also includes sections tinted in blue (for night) and amber. And an excellent score has been written by Raymond Alessandrini, using three themes by Maurice Jaubert. One was originally composed, appropriately enough, for *L'Atalante*.

André Antoine's own epitaph for his film is equally apt today: 'It was magnificent,' he said, when it was all over. 'As everything had been shot on the move, all the pictures had a stereoscopic effect. It was thrilling, and very beautiful.'

KEVIN BROWNLOW

See pictures p 196-197.



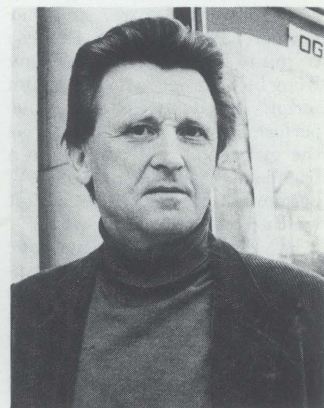
Michael Powell at Salsomaggiore.

Salso

A festival as producer

Most film festivals in their struggle to justify their anachronistic survival have reluctantly given way to rock videos and the like to keep the semblance of an event in touch with the times. The competition is so strong for the few good new films being produced each year that some kind of diversification has become necessary. This is particularly true of Italy, where fifteen reputable festivals are kept in the forefront of a veritable cultural war between the regions whose political colourings make them the recipient of substantial government funding and whose geographical locations allow them prosperous tourist boards.

One such festival has successfully turned necessity into a virtue and has over the last three years worked out by trial and error a remarkable formula. In its seven year history, Salsomaggiore (formerly Monticelli) has shifted from the purist cinephile haven, concerned with furthering research and interest in traditional areas of film culture while still retaining a strong competitive section, to a multi-layered event that combines equally prestigious sections in television



Jean-Marie Straub.

programmes, videograms and the inevitable rock videos. The cinema has retained pride of place, but that is a tribute to the selection committee rather than an artificial 'protection' from the mass interest freely allowed to blossom (especially for younger generations) in the other sections.

The selection of the international jury and the verdict they eventually returned is the most eloquent confirmation of this. Jacques Demy, Henri Alekan, Attilio Bertolucci, Eric de Kuyper, Ida di Benedetto, Jim McBride and the ever youthful Michael Powell awarded the first prize worth \$20,000 to Danièle Huillet and Jean-Marie Straub's *Class Relations* before a jubilant audience. In practice this means that the festival, as well as being an exhibitor and a distributor of commissioned materials, is effectively turning into a producer able to finance the most adventurous technological experiments as well as the most rigorous exponents of pure cinema. Significantly, each section saw the consumption of the individual product as only the first stage in a much more fruitful exchange which took the form of numerous press conferences, workshops and master classes duly recorded and classified on videotape. Access to this material is intended to be an additional part of the impressive documentation normally produced by Italian festivals and helps to build a contemporary library of considerable interest.

DON RANVAUD

Berlin

Black and white quality

Looking back on February's Berlin Festival, the film which stood out of the Competition was *Ah Ying*, the second feature by Allen Fong, whose *Father and Son* was a Berlin discovery in 1981. It plots the relationship between a girl, attempting to improve her lot (a job in a fish market; an overcrowded home; a dissatisfied boy friend) through an acting class at the Hong Kong Film Culture Centre, and her teacher, an American Chinese trying to get to grips with Hong Kong life in order to further a film script. Aided by a marvellous performance by Hui So-Ying as the girl, Fong deftly captures a friendship hovering on the edge of becoming something else, a shift which circumstances preclude.

By tempering naturalistic observation with a more romanticised edge, he also conveys the contradictions facing both his 'typical' female protagonist and Hong Kong generally. In many ways, one felt, *Ah Ying* would have been more at home in the festival's innovative Young



Class Relations: Mario Adorf and Christian Heinisch.

Forum section, as would another entrant in the main event, *Class Relations*, Straub/Huillet's adaptation of Kafka's *Amerika*. Although it is for its makers a fairly straightforward reading of the source material, the wonderful austerity of the black and white images, the rigorously telling use of angles, and the compulsively flat delivery of a succession of talking heads, evokes perfectly the requisite feeling of displacement and dislocation—always a matter of class and capital, rather than individual psychology—and it seemed, in context, a radically minimalist treat.

Among the New German Films, Marianne S. W. Rosenbaum's *Peppermint Frieden* was an impressive first feature. Set mainly in a remote Bavarian village in the aftermath of the war, it examines 'big issues'—the American presence, the threat of nuclear holocaust—through the eyes of the six-year-old Marianne. The film's strength is its absolute refusal to set innocence against experience in any sentimental or reductive fashion. Instead, using surreal and often grotesquely funny imagery, Rosenbaum demonstrates the effects of attempting to conceal the often dubious and unacceptable workings of the world from young eyes: the children thus shielded simply create their own anarchic interpretations of sexuality, religion, etc.

Aside from these one-offs, the most obviously impressive group of films were the various American independents showing in the Forum. What was so en-

couraging was the combination of diverse works and the fact that the same names tended to crop up across the different sets of credits, particularly with New York connected movies. Thus, for example, Lizzie Borden, whose own *Born in Flames* was a Forum success in 1983, was cited at the end of both Bette Gordon's *Variety* and Alexandre Rockwell's *Hero*. The former is a shrewdly, and responsibly, provocative study of a woman who takes a job selling tickets in a sex cinema, a move which leaves her stranded between two narrative worlds: that of pornography, with its investment in the objectification of women, and a thriller plot in which, as she trails a customer conducting his dubious business deals, she might become the principal character. Both options ultimately rebound on the spectator as the real subject of the film emerges: the act of looking.

Hero, part-funded like *Variety* by the West German TV company ZDF, takes on several American archetypes as it follows an 'alternative' nuclear family—a handicapped boy and two women—on a journey through Western small towns and wilderness. A rather self-indulgent mystical streak, hinging on the boy's relationship with a possibly imaginary Red Indian bearer of wisdom, is more than offset by the introduction of Cody, a crazed cowboy they pick up along the way. His staging of Custer's Last Stand, with chickens standing in for cavalrymen, is a moment worthy of Herzog.

Western myths are also confronted in Eagle Pennell's fine

Last Night at the Alamo. Alamo in this case is a redneck bar in Houston which is about to be demolished, a fate which the bar's regulars hope will be averted by Cowboy (Sonny Davis), the closest thing they've got to a Western hero. The script by Kim Henkel (co-writer of *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*) creates an atmosphere of foul-mouthed, desperate drunkenness, with violence and unsatisfactory sexual relations offering occasional diversion. Oppressive and abrasively funny, the film's achievement is the way it encourages interest in, and sympathy for, a collection of basically unappealing characters.

The Straub/Huillet, Rosenbaum and Pennell films were all in black and white, and the growing suspicion that this was the festival's only definite guarantee of quality was magnificently confirmed by Sheila McLaughlin and Lynne Tillman's *Committed*, the most striking of the Forum's American 'indies'. The film deals with actress Frances Farmer, treating her trail from stardom through incarceration in a mental home to final lobotomy, as symptoms of the increasingly reactionary forces at work in American society—its politics and institutions—during the 30s and 40s. The visual style is (again) appropriately *noirish* and the narrative juxtaposes the pressures on Farmer's psyche in a cut-up fashion that refuses any easy separation of the 'personal' (her troubled relationships with her mother and her husband Clifford Odets) and the institutional (the law, psychiatric practices, HUAC, etc). In addition to co-directing, Sheila McLaughlin herself plays Farmer, and provides a strong focal point for what is, quite remarkably for such an assured work, the first feature of both directors.

STEVE JENKINS

Wolves

Filling his head with video nasties

'Exterior. Forest, night: The naked wolf girl runs through the trees, her long hair flowing behind her.' A glimpse into the script of *The Company of Wolves* does not suggest something altogether in line with prevailing notions of 'new' British cinema. But then the film, the second feature to be directed by Neil Jordan, maker of *Angel*, and a first venture by Palace Productions, offshoot of the successful distribution outfit, hardly conforms in other respects: it is no rapid, location-based enterprise, but a £2 million-plus studio picture. To begin with, the budget was more modest; there were even hopes, scotched by the

script's changing seasons, of shooting the forest sequences on location. What had started out as a Channel 4-scale undertaking finally went into production at Shepperton early this year with funding from rrc, who will own the foreign rights.

The kernel of the project is a brief short story by Angela Carter, who has collaborated with Jordan on the screenplay: their first discussions took place in surroundings no less high-flown than a Dublin conference on the work of Borges. The script that developed is elaborate and multi-layered: enough to say that the protagonist is an adolescent girl and that part of the action alludes to the misadventures of Little Red Riding Hood.

The heroine, Rosaleen, is played by a 'discovery', 13-year-old Sarah Patterson, a Hampstead school-girl. Angela Lansbury, an old girl of the self-same school, is her grandmother (when she removes her specs, the script says encouragingly, 'her eyes are cold and steely'); and the cast includes David Warner, Stephen Rea and Tusse Silberg, last seen in *Flight to Berlin*. There are also any number of non-human performers. Over and above the wolves, represented by the real variety as well as by make-up creations by Christopher Tucker of *Elephant Man* fame, the call-sheet resembles some sort of phobia test, with pythons, tarantulas, Sri Lankan toads and even an Amazonian chicken (though this last was apparently dismissed after failing to do its stuff). Not only all this, but toddlers too. While the entrance to the main sound-stage carried an official warning, 'Wolves on set', that to the second bore the handwritten message, 'Danger: babies on set.' For six of the nine weeks shooting, a second unit under Peter MacDonald was in full-time operation on the all-important effects work.

Detailed storyboarding notwithstanding, this double-headed system presented what one of the producers, Chris Brown, described as an organisational nightmare. For Brown (with a background in tv, he is the son of veteran British producer George Brown and brother of former *Tatler* editor Tina Brown) and his co-producer Stephen Woolley (at 26, the prime mover in Palace's earlier activities), this is a first experience of film producing. They appear full of slightly edgy enthusiasm. Jordan, looking appreciably less than his 33 years, speaks with satisfaction about the experience of a studio production. 'The pre-planning it allows is a great advantage. The work may be slower and sometimes the scale of the surroundings risks getting on top of you. There may not be the impetus of having to catch the



The Company of Wolves.

light or the moment that you get on location. But it allows you to determine how every bit of the frame will look.'

With ciné-literate enthusiasm, Woolley proposes that the picture might be held to have affinities with Cocteau, Michael Powell and *Night of the Hunter*, and indeed the script identifies the song which Rosaleen hums at one point as the one from Laughton's film. Jordan, however, says he has avoided conscious references, though coincidentally he invokes Disney in explaining how the undertaking attracted him through its mingling of childhood imagination and Gothic nightmare. As father of two young children, he is much taken with the cinematic possibilities of the stories he reads them, and off the cuff begins to elaborate on how effective the tale of Thumbelina might be on the screen. His actual next project is, though, a considerable change of pace: a script for David Puttnam about the life of the Sinn Féin leader Michael Collins.

Jordan describes *The Company of Wolves*, due for autumn release, as a 'sensual nightmare' but one that owes little to the 'standard horror film'. Woolley suggests that it might ideally be able to build a European reputation as a launch pad into the US market (where *Elephant Man* did not find a very satisfactory place). Cheerily giving a hostage to fortune, he predicts that the British critics are liable to greet the film suspiciously: 'There's a risk that they'll accuse us of filling Neil Jordan's head with video nasties.'

TIM PULLEINE

Iceland

Exploits of a cottage industry

The annual Reykjavik Film Festival startles a first-time prospector at every turn. The country's energetic President Vigdís greets one cordially and talks about her role in founding the event just six years ago; attendances put most festivals to shame (80,000 tickets changed hands last time in a country whose total population is only 238,000).

Local film-makers were much in evidence; Icelandic critics conspicuous by their absence. So one could concentrate on learning the facts of life about a cottage industry that has emerged from isolation in recent years thanks to the pioneering efforts of directors like Ágúst Gudmundsson (trained, incidentally, at Britain's National Film School) and Hrafn Gunnlaugsson.

The breakthrough came in 1980, with the premiere of three films. Ágúst Gudmundsson's *Land and Sons* remains his finest achievement, a beautifully crafted evocation of life in rural Iceland before the war, with a young man lurching free of his bondage to the traditional farmstead. Similar in feeling, if not in idiom, was Hrafn Gunnlaugsson's *Ancestral Estate*, in which a younger son is forced to abandon his dreams of a career in the city and buckle down to the task of maintaining the family smallholding. The third film from 1980, *The Fishing Trip*, was clumsily

made but no less amiable than many a Children's Film Foundation effort during the 1960s.

At present, Iceland is producing at least four films each year. The government Film Fund does inject some money into production (ranging from as little as 2 per cent to around 20 per cent), but individual film-makers rely on the banks and their personal collateral for raising the budget. Fortunes soar and plummet alarmingly as a result. The talented couple responsible for the admirably shot if ineffectually avant-garde *Rainbow's End* (1983) are struggling to recover from their indebtedness, while Ágúst's rock musical *On Top* has smashed all records for attendance, selling over 100,000 tickets.

Perhaps the most engaging virtue of the films is their concentration on national themes and locations. There have been hardly any co-productions of the kind that involve horrendous dubbing and foreign stars wandering around the hot springs. Even a flawed work like *If Sandra Should See This...*, directed by Kristín Pálsdóttir, and written in part by another active woman film-maker, Guðný Halldórsdóttir, makes intelligent use of an isolated summer cottage, where a scriptwriter tries in vain to concentrate on his latest screenplay assignment. Egill Edvardsson's *The House*, by contrast, sites its *Don't Look Now*-type story of the supernatural in present-day Reykjavik. Edvardsson's control of the elaborate time lapses in this film, and the acting of Lilja Thórisdóttir as the young teacher assailed by spirits from the past, would be excellent in any country's cinematic output, let alone such a tiny, prentice one.

The sagas represent Iceland's gift to world literature, and Hrafn Gunnlaugsson's *When the Raven Flies* gallops through its tale of Viking plunder, rape and revenge with all the panache of Sergio Leone. Gunnlaugsson also confesses to a profound admiration for Kurosawa's *Yojimbo*, and certainly the Emperor's style and brio, if not quite his artistry, are discernible in the audacious shots of cliffs and seashore and his searching, gigantic close-ups.

When the Raven Flies demolishes the received image of Viking heroism that Icelanders are taught at school, and even in a tv drama like *Whiplash* (1982), Hrafn has sought to outrage conventional viewers, prising loose the sexual perversions that may or may not haunt the sleepy northern town of Akureyri. For long the *enfant terrible* of Icelandic cinema, Hrafn has fought vigorously and impudently for his art, helping to establish the film festival and ploughing through committee

work as well as writing and directing like a whirlwind.

Prospects are good. Thorsteinn Jónsson has completed a screen version of Nobel Laureate Halldór Laxness' *Atomic Station*, written just after the war but clearly relevant today, with the American base in Keflavík a prime target in any nuclear conflict. Ágúst Guðmundsson is to shoot a new film, about a mini-goldrush that took place on the island not so long ago, and Þráinn Bertelsson is involved in two productions, back to back, the first a poltergeist thriller called *Twilight* and set on a remote farm and the second a local comedy, *Healthy Life*. The other Nordic countries may be hard pressed to stay with the pace.

PETER COWIE

Costa-Gavras

Reflections of a naturalised Frenchman

Born in Greece in 1933, but resident in France since 1952, Costa-Gavras likes to insist on his nationality as a naturalised Frenchman. Recalling that his interest in cinema was formed entirely in his adoptive country, he also regards himself as a French film-maker, an identity confirmed by his appointment in 1982 to take over from Henri Langlois as President of the Cinéma-thèque Française.

In London last March for a retrospective of his own work at the National Film Theatre, he mentioned some recent Cinéma-thèque projects, including a 500-film season of Japanese cinema (see SIGHT AND SOUND, Spring 1984), research into the possibility of transferring film to video disc and the recent reconstruction of André Antoine's *L'Hirondelle et la Mésange*. 'In the beginning I was a little naive—I thought the work would be much easier. My mandate was for three years, and even if I were offered another term of office, I wouldn't be able to take it up.'

Since the success of *Missing* in 1981, his projects to direct have been many and various. 'I've had many propositions, including three proposals for films about Northern Ireland—the latest was about the escape from the Maze—but none of them gave me the necessary *coup de coeur*. That's why I only make a movie every two years. But I have had a lot of discussions with Yilmaz Güney about a collaboration, probably a story centred on Cyprus, about how Turks and Greeks might coexist without fighting.' He vigorously disagrees that public interest in films about current controversies might be ebbing away in the apolitical 80s.

In *Hanna K*, his latest film

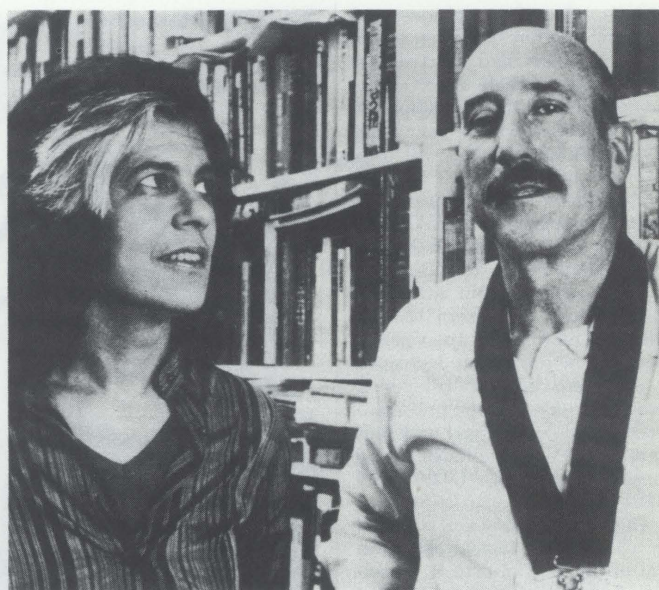
which explores the complexities of Zionism as experienced by an American Jewish lawyer practising in Israel and by the Palestinian Arab she is assigned to defend, Costa-Gavras develops his own increasing preoccupation with the micro-politics of private lives as well as with the problems of patriotism and patrimony. *Hanna K* has attracted considerable critical hostility, in part because the inconsequentiality of its conclusion that '*chacun a ses raisons*' lacks the comforting Manichaeism of his best known work.

'I like irony,' he ripostes—I think it's a very strong element in life. It used to surprise me when audiences laughed at certain moments in my films, even *Missing*, because I wasn't trying to make gags. Then I understood: I was trying to get over the absurdity of impossible situations, and people responded to that absurdity, which is very sane of them. I admire what we call the *mélange des genres*, a mixture of dramatic elements which is very strong in the Anglo-Saxon tradition, such as Shakespeare's plays, but not at all in the French classical theatre.'

He remains a confident populist, believing absolutely in his audience: it might not be possible, he concedes, for a political movie to get people out on the streets but he points out how dangerous that power would be. Recognition of this need to reach out to audiences is, he feels, a new departure in French cinema over the last couple of years. 'Directors have felt the need not only to get good reviews and be accepted by the theoreticians—and, God knows, we have enough of them in France; you could say that they are all we have—but also to make a good, popular cinema.'

The talk turns to the *cause célèbre* of Jacques Demy's *Une Chambre en Ville*, the box-office failure of which, combined with the enormous popularity of the latest Belmondo vehicle, provoked Paris critics to take out an ad in *Le Monde* to protest at the execrability of public taste. 'This,' Costa-Gavras says spiritedly, 'was a stupid thing to do—to play one movie off against another. People must choose for themselves. If they want to see Belmondo, they should see Belmondo, and the critics must push for why they should also go to see Demy. Every country has its own violence, physical or political. In France, our violence is essentially an intellectual fanaticism—it's part of the national character.' An opinion that probably only a Frenchman, naturalised or otherwise, could pronounce with confident impunity.

SHEILA JOHNSTON



Improper Conduct: Susan Sontag and Nestor Almendros.

Full circle

Aveyron farmers and Cuban exiles

New York's New Directors/New Films festival, presented every spring by the Museum of Modern Art and the Film Society of Lincoln Center, doesn't have quite the cultural status or the popularity of the New York Film Festival in the fall, but it satisfies different needs. On the crudest level, it appeals to the city's insatiable demand for novelty, the need to remain a step ahead of trends in the arts: to buy a ticket for any one of these unknown quantities is to gamble for the privilege of being *there* for the debut of a Spielberg, a Tanner, a George Miller, a Peter Greenaway. But the deepest pleasure lies in discovering the unrepeatable films, the true oddities: the movies that aren't conceived as the beginning (or the middle or the end) of anything, that seem to glow with amazement at their own unlikely existence.

Unlikeliest of all, perhaps, was Georges Rouquier's *Biquefarre*, a return to the territory of his 1946 classic of French rural life *Farrebique*. Rouquier—who, at 74, qualifies as a 'new director' by virtue of having had only one previous feature released in the US—was long unable to find backing for his project in France, and the funds for script development finally came from an unexpected source: a grant, secured by three American academics who admired his films, from the US government's National Endowment for the Humanities. After this long struggle, Rouquier has made *Biquefarre* in a stubborn, eccentric, wholly personal style which gives his story an unusual

resonance: in the end, Roch Rouquier, 78 years old and recovering from a stroke, has succeeded, with the help of his younger brother Henri, in expanding the original family farm by the purchase of the neighbouring farm—a late vindication for a man who, in *Farrebique*, had been berated by his father for lack of ambition.

The film *Biquefarre* is Georges Rouquier's own vindication, a long-delayed fulfilment. Like *Farrebique*, the new film is only partly a documentary—the Aveyron farmers act out a fictional story, with scripted dialogue—and the mixture of forms is used to more complex effect here: the awkwardness of the non-professional actors is more pointed and more endearing in *Biquefarre*, because their roughness contrasts so sharply with the smooth, modern surfaces that surround them. The stiffness of the actors' gestures seems, at times, a measure of their difficulty in negotiating a changing environment; at other times, it seems a kind of protest against that environment, a refusal to fit in—a quality of heroic intransigence which links them to their film-maker cousin Georges.

The other miraculous film of this year's festival was Nestor Almendros and Orlando Jiménez Leal's documentary on Cuban exiles, *Improper Conduct*. Like *Biquefarre*, the project had a curious financial history—turned down everywhere in the US, where the enormous Cuban population would seem to guarantee an interested audience, the film-makers ultimately found backing in France—and it, too, has the passionate quality of old obsessions, finally resolved: both Almendros and Jiménez Leal left Cuba in the early 60s, forced out by the censorship and harassment of

Castro's government. All those interviewed have similar stories to tell, and their testimony adds up to a devastating portrait of a socialist revolution gone wrong. The film is predictably (and understandably) angry, and unpredictably melancholy: the factual revelations are powerful, but the fleeting revelations of the complicated, puzzled sadness of exiles and ex-revolutionaries are what make this a great political documentary. A strident, catalogue-of-horrors tone would have defeated the film-makers' purpose: *Improper Conduct* seems to have been aimed at an intellectual, even a left-wing, audience—it means to open the eyes of those to whom Castro is a hero.

The interviewees are an impressive lot: the exiled writers Guillermo Cabrera Infante, Heberto Padilla and Reinaldo Arenas; the journalist Carlos Franqui, an important figure in the early days of the revolution; Martha Frayde, once a minister in Castro's government; Susan Sontag and Juan Goytisolo, former supporters of the revolution; and several homosexuals, members of one of the most persecuted minorities under Castro's regime. By nature, these are reflective people, and many are still leftists—they clearly don't believe that repression is inherent in a socialist state, so they have to think about why it exists in this one. *Improper Conduct* doesn't propose a single explanation for the Cuban government's persecution of homosexuals, intellectuals, 'hippies', and others, just a series of provocative speculations. These exiles are so reasonable and so intelligent, so apparently free of bitterness, that their anecdotes and their theories carry an unusual moral authority. In its quiet way, the argument of *Improper Conduct* is close to unanswerable.

There were, of course, good

films by younger directors, too. *Rue Cases Nègres* was one of the hits of the festival—three weeks later, it was the only festival film still running in a commercial cinema—and it's not hard to see why. Euzhan Palcy's film is a warm, absorbing, confidently narrated story of a bright boy growing up in Martinique in the 1930s and taking his first steps outside the squalid life of the cane-field workers. It's conventional, and overly reminiscent of the early Satyajit Ray pictures, but beautifully done. Yoshimitsu Morita's *The Family Game* is a wacky, poisonous (though not always fully coherent) satire on bourgeois life and education in Japan: Morita has a real flair for visual comedy, and makes inventive use of the contrast between the cramped, impossibly tiny living space of the successful middle-class family and the vast, bleak industrial landscape outside.

Best of all was the Danish *Zappa*, the most complex and satisfyingly shaped of the festival's many films about troubled children and adolescents. After the lovely, oddly unsettling opening shot of three bicycle headlights bobbing and weaving and crossing each other on a dark, tree-lined street, director Bille August and his collaborator, the novelist and screenwriter Bjarne Reuter, ease into the story of three clean-cut adolescent boys who style themselves a prankish 'gang' in the Denmark of the early 60s. Gradually, their obvious leader, the unhappy Sten, becomes crueller, more manipulative: petty thefts lead to larger ones, which lead, inevitably, to violence, and the other boys are cajoled, then bullied, into complicity.

August consistently avoids turning this savage, pessimistic material into a parable of evil, a middle-class *Lord of the Flies*. Even after the traumatic fight which releases the hero Bjorn from Sten's moral grip, August ends his film with an unexpectedly moving image of Bjorn and his little brother watching fireworks: Bjorn's arm is around the younger boy's shoulder, as if to protect him from the confusion of growing up, the uncontrollable explosions of adolescence. It's as beautiful as *Biquefarre*'s last shot of the Rouquier brothers—70-year-old Henri supporting the half-paralysed 78-year-old Roch—announcing their triumph at their father's grave, and these two memorable images seem to link the disparate aims of the New Directors/New Films series in a strange unity, a smooth circle in which promising beginnings and belated fulfilments are indistinguishable.

TERRENCE RAFFERTY



Biquefarre.

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HARRAP

Video Censors

Neville Hunnings

'It is not only a Bill, my Lords, of a very extraordinary nature, but it has been brought in at a most extraordinary season, and pushed with most extraordinary despatch.

'Such a law ought to be maturely considered, and every clause, every sentence, nay, every word of it, well weighed and examined, lest under some of those methods presumed or pretended to be necessary for restraining licentiousness, a power should lie concealed, which might be afterwards made use of for giving a dangerous wound to liberty...'

*The Earl of Chesterfield
on the Playhouse Bill 1737*

Two decades ago, John Trevelyan, then Secretary of the British Board of Film Censors, put on a programme at the National Film Theatre of clips from films which were considered so violent as to be beyond the pale. Images remain in the mind of a Japanese gangster being taken for a ride and beaten up; of a man having his leg sawn off—through the fabric of his trousers, so one could not see too much. The show made quite an impression; but we were all very innocent then.

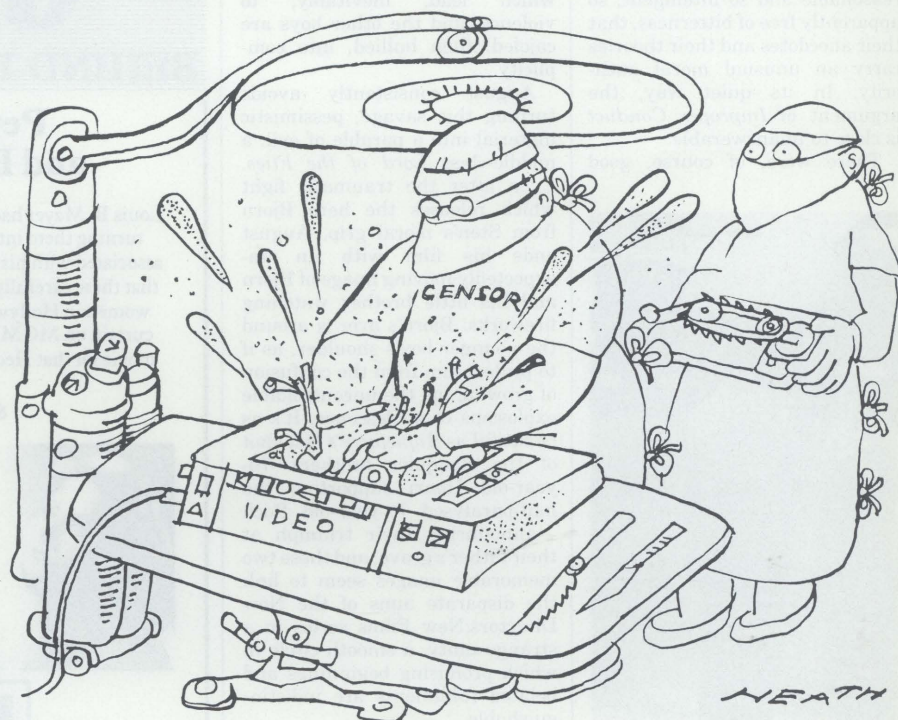
When James Ferman put on a similar exhibition two years ago at a conference of film censors, many of those sophisticated and case-hardened men and women were shocked at the nature of the violence he demonstrated to them, for it had now become heavily sexualised. Not only rape but mixed in with it slashings and stabbings and burnings and even more exquisitely vicious and inventive acts. More subversively, many of these, particularly the hardcore pornographic films, contained a subliminal message that really the women victims liked it. The extracts shown were mostly from badly acted and directed, if sometimes well photographed, exploitation movies like *House on the Edge of the Park*, with the telltale mindless passivity of the victims which is typical of hardcore pornography, together with a few sequences of sexual violence cut out from properly produced certificated films. Both these shows were *jeux d'esprit* by highly sophisticated British film censors to show

the nature of the unsuspected material they were protecting us from.

One and a half years later things took a more serious turn, when a powerful lobbying organisation led by Mrs Mary Whitehouse, that Anthony Comstock of British life today, combined with the police to produce and show a 20-minute tape of similar clips. But this time the purpose was not to inform. It was to manipulate politicians. Three times that tape has thus been shown. Once in the House of Commons on the eve of the second reading of the Video Recordings Bill; once in the House of Lords only minutes before they debated the same Bill; and once in the European Parliament to soften up its legislators in protection against a flanking movement. It was cleverly compiled, with the adept inclusion of a *Mondo Cane*-type sequence showing a live monkey having its brains eaten in an Oriental restaurant. That non-sexual non-sadomasochist sequence was mentioned time and again in the ensuing debates and, as one who closed his eyes during the calf-slaughtering frames of *Le Sang des Bêtes* many years

ago, I can well understand its impact. But it was irrelevant to the issue.

The issue is video. Four years ago video cassettes were a high technology dream which nobody was taking really seriously. Now 30 per cent of the UK population aged seven and over are regular video watchers. The acquisition of video distribution rights is big business (the video rights in *Star Wars* were sold for some \$15 million) and it has become a major form of delivery of film performances, competing with old-fashioned cinemas which had already lost their morale under the impact of television. The great virtue of the video cassette is the freedom it gives the consumer. Film exhibition in Britain has always been strongly cartellised and never more so than today. If there is still a local cinema, it gives very little choice and hardly ever a reprise. If a film is missed, the only way to catch up with it for most people is to wait until it appears on television. Video shops, however, have a large choice of titles on their shelves and at highly competitive rental prices. If an even greater choice is wanted, there



are mail order firms, together with the possibility of buying cassettes abroad in their countries of origin. Films can become more like recorded music or books, with each individual able to acquire or borrow just those titles he wants and when he wants. Cassettes give us freedom from the circuit bookers and distribution oligopolies, greater individual control and hence are more democratic.

'Freedom?' said Geoffrey Finsberg MP last year on television. 'What we have had in recent years is licence!' Those who fear freedom will always have it thus. And the appearance on the video market of a small number of explicitly violent films has raised a banshee wail which the more straight sex films, hardcore or not, were quite unable to raise. What happened?

The chairman of the video distributors' trade association, the British Videogram Association, became early aware of the mischief that could be caused by certain violent films which, through lurid advertising, were already coming to public notice—three in particular which have continually been cited in argument: *Driller Killer*, *SS Experiment Camp* and *I Spit on Your Grave*. The term 'video nasties' gradually came to be applied, to describe their exceptionally unpleasant nature. And yet they were only a short step away from the legitimate cinema. *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* had become a cult movie on American campuses, spawning a yet unended series of similar violent horror movies, one of which, *The Evil Dead*, became number one on the list of UK video rentals in 1983. Satanism, violent revenge, psychotic killers—all have a powerful history in mainstream films (not to mention Jacobean tragedy and nineteenth century Grand Guignol). Directors such as Pasolini, Oshima, Hitchcock have had a fascination with that shadowed side of the human psyche; and others with less artistic justification have not felt inhibited from pushing portrayal of violence to the limit of the publicly acceptable. We are going through a period of immense social and historical change which people over the age of sixty cannot understand, and such periods are always reflected in entertainment and the arts. The 'nasties', or the taste for them, may be an extreme example of that. The BVA defined them as including disembowelling, castration, cannibalism and humiliation.

In early 1982 the BVA asked the British Board of Film Censors to set up a working party to look into the question of video nasties and recommend a classification system so as to prevent the problem getting any worse. The desire of the BVA was for a voluntary code, to be enforced by the industry. There was indeed some doubt whether the distributors and still more the retailers would accept even that; and James Ferman's wish to impose firm obligations on the traders had to be balanced by the need to obtain a consensus.

At that time the Home Office was acting very cannily. Some sort of statu-

tory framework might be best, but the necessary legislation would take time to devise. In October 1982 the Government was keeping the situation under review in the light especially of the discussions in the working party about a certification scheme. 'Should such a scheme be introduced, we would wish to assess its effect before deciding whether any statutory controls were required,' said Patrick Mayhew MP for the Home Office. On the other hand, a trade-enforced scheme would run the risk of the wrath of the Office of Fair Trading, since it would enforce conformity on the trade and place distributors who were not BVA members at a competitive disadvantage. The final solution was a voluntary code of practice.

While the working party was sitting, the BBFC was rejigging its own classification scheme for cinemas. The old 'U', 'A' and 'X' pattern was thought to have become less helpful in present-day conditions and the letters themselves somewhat confusing. Much of the discussion at the conference of film censors the previous year had been devoted to classification categories, and particularly to the various age breaks. However the future went, and whether mandatory film censorship remained or,

The BVA defines the 'nasty' as including disembowelling, castration, cannibalism and humiliation

following the trend throughout Western Europe from north to south, was abolished, classification would be needed if only as a method of consumer and parental guidance on a voluntary trade basis. A new scheme would need, therefore, to be appropriate for the many different forms of presentation of audio-visual works which might emerge in years to come. The Board therefore produced a new 'multi-media category system for screen entertainment', based on the most advanced thinking and designed to permit flexible and subtle application.

Appropriately for an age in which packaging and labelling were important and for a type of entertainment which would be bought and hired in retail shops, the new categories were designed, like road signs, to give immediate visual information. Films that anyone may see—'U' (universal) and 'PG' (parental guidance, borrowed from the United States: 'Some scenes may be unsuitable for young children')—are given triangles. Those with age bars, at 15 and 18 years of age, are given red circles. A new special category, 'restricted 18' (for restricted distribution only, through segregated premises to which no one under the age of 18 is

admitted), was given a large mauve rectangle.

This new classification scheme was brought into operation for cinemas (after the licensing authorities had approved it) and adopted by the working party as part of the code which it recommended, together with a proposal that all packaging for videograms not classified 'U' should include a brief indication of the nature of the contents and the reason for the certificate given, this to be drafted by the distributor. A Video Standards Council would be constituted on the lines of the General Medical Council, the Press Council and the Advertising Standards Authority and it would be responsible for administering the scheme. The actual classification would be carried out by the BBFC under contract. In addition, and in view of the public importance of film advertising, a Publicity and Packaging Committee would be formed to censor all copy and pictorial material intended for use in conjunction with videograms in the 15 and 18 categories.

The report was adopted in January 1983. Approval of the BVA Council, the member distributors and the retailers was obtained, and the new 'BVA Classification Code' was launched on 13 April 1983. The Home Office expressed satisfaction; and it might well have been generally accepted as a workable system if a general election had not been called the following month. We shall have to wait thirty years to discover whether this was 1916 in reverse, whether the Home Office's sudden change of attitude was the result of ministerial changes or whether it followed from the greater confidence of a Government which was returned with an overwhelming majority and so was the more ready to listen sympathetically to the secret urgings of congenial pressure groups. Whatever the cause, support for the BVA scheme was killed stone dead and official energies were switched to devising a compulsory state censorship system.

The means came swiftly to hand. Top of the ballot for private members' Bills in the new Parliament came a junior Home Office MP, Mr Graham Bright, who agreed to resign his post as Parliamentary Private Secretary to a Home Office Minister in order to introduce and shepherd through a private members' Bill to censor video cassettes. 'The law as it stands,' he said, 'cannot operate as effectively as we would like. Some of the worst tapes have been caught by the Obscene Publications Act 1959, but there are a large number whose content falls short of the strict test of obscenity in that Act; and the present law, moreover, provides no guidance to a retailer on what is suitable for different age groups. My conclusion, therefore, is that the law should be strengthened. Some form of pre-censorship is needed, coupled with clear guidelines as to the suitability of particular cassettes for particular age groups.' The Bill, at that stage only a name without any contents, was given formal first reading on 20 July 1983 and then disappeared into the womb of the

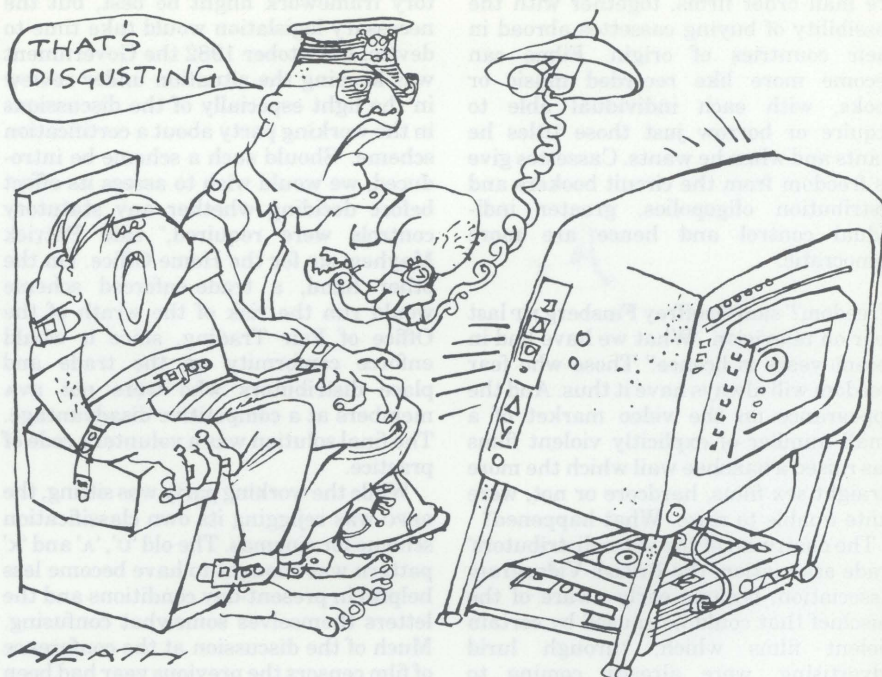
Home Office to gestate for 3½ months.

When it emerged at the beginning of November, the Bill was absolute. No video work might be supplied unless it had first been censored (subject to certain exceptions). A few days later, on the eve of the second reading debate, the Campaign Against Censorship held a protest meeting in the House; but the Bill was debated the following day without a single dissentient voice. During its committee stage, which followed swiftly and was completed by mid-February 1984, all parties vied in supporting it, not least the Labour Party, and only Robert MacLennan of the SDP engaged in any probing into the implications of such a revolutionary measure. Only two amendments were allowed in committee, although several more were made on report. In the Lords the refrain was: 'Don't rock the boat'; anything which might delay the Bill, whether the appointment of a select committee to investigate the issues or an amendment which would require further consideration in the Commons, was steadfastly opposed. At all costs the Bill had to get back to the Commons intact and ready for royal assent this summer—before the trade, the public and all who care for our liberties had recovered from the trance into which the magic words 'video nasty' and 'children' had thrown them, woken to the scale of the attack and begun to resist.

The last time that a British Parliament passed an Act imposing censorship was in 1737, when theatre censorship was instituted—and that took some 220 years to reverse. In all that time and more, for nearly 300 years, we have enjoyed freedom to sell and hire information, art and entertainment of all kinds without prior restraint. But no longer.

The Bill covers any series of visual images produced electronically through a disc or magnetic tape and shown as a moving picture. Originally interactive devices were excluded, but when someone in committee said that video games were about in which rape and other nasty activities were portrayed the exclusion was promptly excluded. Whether in fact such second thoughts will succeed may be doubted, since video games are driven by ROMs and not by disc or tape. The extent to which computer graphics in general are covered is uncertain, especially as most software packages are marketed on tape or disc. Laser disc encyclopedias are certainly covered. So are video journals, in spite of a valiant but unsuccessful effort by Lord Houghton to exclude works 'reporting and commenting upon current affairs'. So press censorship now has a toe in the door.

The supply of a video work either for reward or in the course of a business is only lawful if the work has been censored and given a classification certificate. The Government is empowered to appoint any body it thinks fit to carry out the censoring, and it has made clear its intention to entrust the task to the British Board of Film Censors. This so incensed many MPs on the standing committee, who thought that the Board has been shockingly lenient in recent



years, that six of the nine sittings of the committee were devoted to that single issue.

The classification categories as outlined in the Bill allow the new BBFC certificates to be used, with the slight alteration that 'Restricted 18' videos may only be supplied from licensed sex shops (or by mail order, although that may be amended out). It is intended that the category symbols should be fixed or printed on the packaging; and supplying an unmarked video would be an offence. Supplying an unclassified video is made punishable by as much as a £20,000 fine

It took some 220 years to rid the theatre of Parliamentary-imposed censorship

by magistrates (there is no jury trial), a massive power for lay magistrates who are not normally trusted to impose fines of more than £2,000.

The scheme of the Bill is very simple—as its sponsors kept saying. If the video is a 'video work' it may only be supplied if it lawfully bears a censor's mark. If it does not, the person supplying it can be prosecuted (and heavily fined) merely for that offence. It is not necessary to prove anything about the film itself, but only whether it has been censored and what category it has been given.

There are, however, exceptions. They were intended to strike a balance and they apply both to the video works themselves ('an exempted work') and to the circumstances in which they are supplied ('an exempted supply'). Free

loan or gift of a film between friends is an exempted supply, but not if it is paid for. Supply for exhibition purposes (the Bill leaves intact the existing rules on censorship for exhibition), e.g. in cinemas or film societies or on television (but not in the home), is exempt; so is most supply for professional purposes between the various sections of the film industry and including laboratories and probably including the use of videos for trade shows and other marketing purposes: the provisions on this are not particularly clear and may cause trouble.

Amateur films are in general caught by the censorship requirements, the only home movies to be exempt being 'actuality' sequences which 'provide a record of an event or occasion for those who took part in the event or occasion or are connected with those who did so.' Videos of weddings are therefore exempt, but not if they are sold to strangers, e.g. if the couple are famous. *Le Déjeuner de Bébé* would be all right if presented to M Lumière for his family collection, but not if sold to the public as an example of the marvels of modern science.

Works are exempted if, taken as a whole, they are designed to inform, educate or instruct or are concerned with sport, religion or music or are video games; but if a video, to any significant extent, 'depicts human sexual activity' or acts of force associated with it (e.g. sexual sadism) or mutilation or torture (the Crucifixion?) or human genital organs or human urinary or excretory functions, then even religious films or educational or informational films cease to be exempt and must be submitted for censorship. Medical films were added to the exempt category at a later stage. The precise borderline of some of these categories will keep the lawyers busy for many a year, particularly as heavy fines may greet a miscalculation. Will a newsreel or documentary of the Vietnam war be exempt? Or *The Day After*? Or films made by women's groups to combat rape? Is 42nd

Street or *Saturday Night Fever* 'concerned with music', or does that only apply to video versions of music on gramophone records?

The exemptions are important because of the cost, delay and procedural bother the censorship imposes, as well as because exempted films will escape being classified. Film equivalents of *The Little Red Schoolbook* can presumably expect little mercy. For mainstream films, however, there will be little change: where films are cut for cinema release cassettes of the uncut version will presumably no longer be available (except on the black market). One more safety valve will have been screwed down.

It is unconventional distribution which will suffer most. Will the BFI Video Club be able to afford the censorship fees (expected to be about £400 for a feature film) for small quantities of *Dr Mabuse* or *Night of the Hunter*? Certainly it will be uneconomic to import single copies of films which have never been submitted in cassette (or perhaps even otherwise) to the British censor. That may bring the Bill into conflict with the Common Market, since the censorship paraphernalia will constitute a non-tariff barrier to imports from other member States of the EEC. Likewise, the Bill is in breach of article 10 of the European Convention of Human Rights, since a comprehensive pre-censorship is clearly disproportionate to the alleged aim of protecting children from a couple of dozen

video nasties and hence is not 'necessary in a democratic society'. The impact of the Bill on ethnic minorities in Britain does not seem to have been considered, despite the fact that Britain is one of the largest markets for Indian films outside India itself.

More serious politically is the effect of the Bill on cassettes made by and circulating among members of minority groups or made privately for political or social propaganda. It will have a destructive effect on what used to be called avant-garde experimental films and on personal statements in film form, which at last were becoming financially feasible since video cameras do not need expensive film stock. One's only hope is that just as the universal spread of home computers makes nonsense of the registration requirements of the Data Privacy Bill, so the spread of home video-making will make some at least of the censorship requirements impossible to enforce.

But there is one particularly sinister aspect of the Bill. The BBFC will be transformed from a relatively powerless body relying for its effect on the moral force and acceptability of its decisions to a balance of local authorities, Government, trade and public, into a powerful body deriving its force from its appointment by the Government. That will inevitably rub off from video censorship to its more traditional film censorship role. Already the Director of Public Prosecutions has

communicated to the Board its 'guidelines' of acceptability for films (but stubbornly refuses to make them public); the Board will certainly be applying in the future standards which are at the very least compatible with those police rules.

The report on *Video Violence and Children* compiled by Clifford Hill et al for the Parliamentary Group Video Enquiry (March 1984) used quite uncritically as its working list of video nasties a collection of titles culled from conversations with the police and representing videos which were being prosecuted or being considered by the DPP for prosecution as well as those the courts (mostly lay magistrates) had already found to be obscene. During the debate on the Bill in the Lords on 28 April, Lord Elton for the Home Office said that he would have talks about the possibility of the BBC and IBA (whose programmes although already broadcast to the home will still have to be censored again under the Bill if they are to be sold on cassette) talking to the BBFC to see if common standards and criteria could be applied to broadcasts as well as to video material. Police views are thus, in one gargantuan rush, coming to dominate the pre-censorship of videos, of films and possibly of television programmes as well. The Bill provides no protection against that; indeed it encourages it by giving carte blanche to the Home Secretary as regards all detailed application of this new and dangerous censorship system. ■



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When the lease

A tax-shelter device that, over the past five years, had literally given the British film industry a new lease of life was brought to an unceremonious and premature end by the Chancellor of the Exchequer in this year's budget. Whether it also means the end of the recent healthier phase in British cinema depends, to some extent, on what, if anything, replaces the incentives that are being phased out. Within the industry, there is no lack of helpful suggestions. It is unclear, however, whether a sink-or-swim government is prepared to take any of them aboard.

What exactly has Nigel Lawson done that is so alarming and which has got some of the more vociferous elements in the industry crying wolf yet again? It sounds rather technical. Facts first, then, and explanations later. What he has done is to reduce first-year capital allowances from 100 to 75 per cent for 1984-85, reducing again to 50 per cent in the following year and to nil in respect of expenditure incurred on or after 1 April 1986. Other expenditure (not qualifying for first-year allowances) can be written down at the rate of 25 per cent per annum. Expenditure that might previously have qualified for the 100 per cent allowances in the period up to 1 April 1987 will retain that privilege only if a binding contract had been entered into on or before budget day, 1984.

What, you may ask, has all this widgetry and fiscal mumbo jumbo to do with James Bond? The answer, as it happens, is a great deal. The fact is that, for tax and depreciation purposes, films have been treated in just the same way as a piece of plant and machinery. Companies have been allowed to write off their entire investment in a particular picture in the very first year. This meant in practice that profits from one picture could escape tax to the extent that they were matched by capital expenditure on another. In short, so long as the company continued to make successful films, it could enjoy a tax holiday.

All this started in August 1979 with a statement of practice from the Inland Revenue (SP9/79) indicating that films could henceforward be depreciated at the rate of 100 per cent in year one. Initially, no distinction was made between British and non-British films. As a result, a number of films benefited from these allowances even though they were made abroad and, to all intents and purposes, were American pictures. The tax concessions were therefore narrowed down in the 1982 Finance Act, section 72 of which specified that first-year allowances would no longer be available to overseas films with little or no British content (i.e., those that would not qualify for Eady money).

British films were to continue to enjoy tax benefits at first only for two transitional years until 31 March 1984. After much lobbying, however, Nicholas Ridley, then Financial Secretary to the Treasury, announced in January 1983 that the transitional period would be extended for three more years up to 31 March 1987. The film industry breathed again. It inferred that, subject to the concession not being abused, it was the government's intention that the industry should continue to enjoy first-year capital allowances more or less indefinitely. How wrong that was. Not only has the Chancellor put a stop to the practice, he has actually curtailed the grace period.

Initial reactions from the film industry have been predictably pained and anguished. 'It looks likely,' says the Association of Independent Producers, 'that the Chancellor's reform of capital allowances will snuff out the growing confidence in the production of British films, just as the industry is beginning to experience its first period of sustained growth.' A prominent lawyer, who is closely involved with structuring film finance packages, ventures that the proposed changes in allowances would have a devastating effect on the industry. 'Some films,' he says, 'will still be made, but there will be far fewer and a lot of British talent will go abroad.'

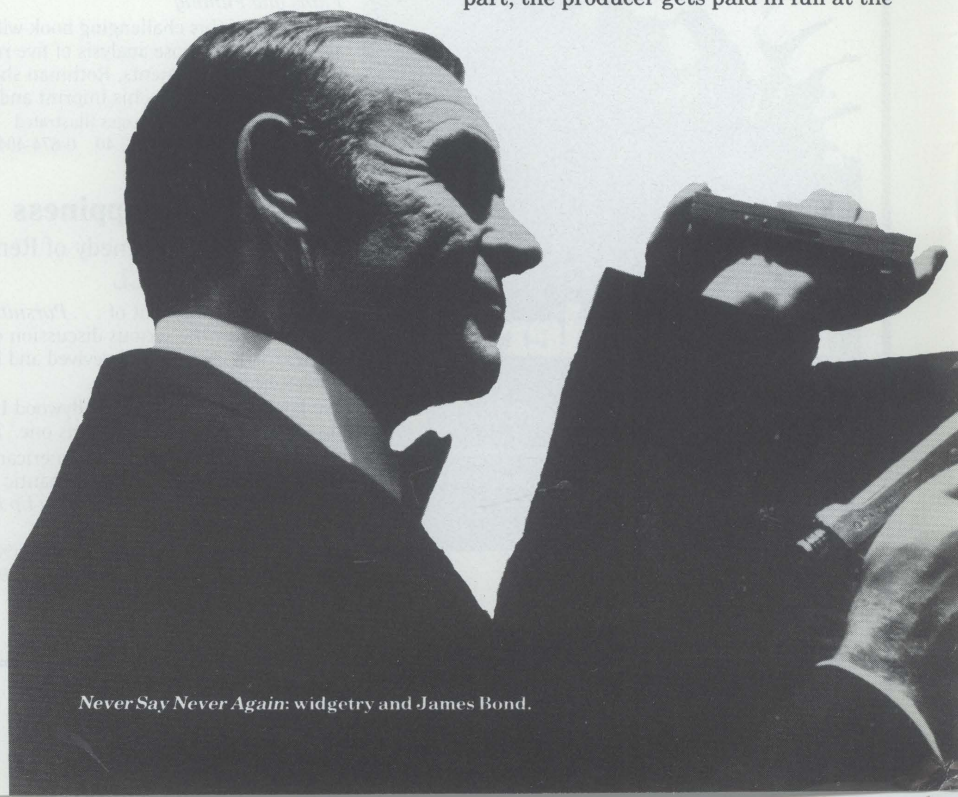
This is a familiar bleat—the kind we have been hearing, off and on, for the past 30 years. Is this really a historic turning point, which will subsequently be recognised as the beginning of the end for the British film industry? Probably not. The

entertainment industry, its accountants and lawyers have a great capacity for finding new ways of doing business.

Take capital allowances themselves. The way in which they were put to use to enable films to be made was nothing if not resourceful. Though the first-year allowances were fine in theory, one big potential drawback was that many film production companies did not have sufficient profits to be cushioned. A million pounds' worth of tax allowances are not much help if you have profits of only a few thousand pounds or (more likely) accumulated losses against which to set them. Or if your ultimate parent does not pay UK tax.

How to get the allowances into the hands of somebody who could use them? That was the challenge. Enter the notion, already familiar in the property world, of the sale and leaseback transaction. How, in a film context, does this work? The producer actually sells his film to a company or consortium that may have no connection with the film industry but has profits on which it wishes to defer tax liability. As the new owner of the film, it could depreciate it at the rate of 100 per cent in the first year, absorbing those profits for tax purposes.

The owner then leases the film to the distributor (who may also be the producer) for an agreed number of years. The profits that would have been taxed at once have been used to buy the film and are in fact exchanged for a stream of rental income receivable over the term of the lease. This income is taxable, but over a much longer period. In the meantime, it produces an interest element. For his part, the producer gets paid in full at the



Never Say Never Again: widgetry and James Bond.

runs out

ALAN STANBROOK

discusses capital allowances,
the budget and the film industry

outset (instead of having to wait for royalties) and can then reinvest in future productions.

Anybody, however, who imagines that first-year allowances and leasing arrangements have led in themselves to a flowering of the British film industry that would not otherwise have happened is being naive. Many films financed in this way would have been shot anyway (the tax breaks were a bonus). What's more, many (though not all) were only technically British. A Barclays Bank offshoot, Mercantile Industrial Finance, was behind *Reds*, but nobody would seriously take that for a British film.

Even *Never Say Never Again*, which, at a cost of £33m, required the biggest film syndication ever mounted in the UK, is only tenuously British. The financing of the film was arranged through Albion Films, which is partly owned by the City merchant bank Samuel Montagu. The syndicate included Midland Bank, European Banking Company, Manufacturers Hanover and First Chicago. They could have financed the film as members of a partnership or through a joint venture, but preferred, for tax reasons, to own it outright. This gave rise to a number of problems. Did their year-ends match? Should the security be shared? Would all members of the syndicate be able to participate in the capital allowances? These were some of the issues to be resolved and which required expert legal opinion.

The biggest problem was that the actual production finance came from Chemical Bank in America. Its security

was a charge over the completed film, which had to be lifted at the time of the refinancing by the syndicate in order for the latter to acquire unencumbered title and the right to capital allowances. Part of Chemical Bank's security also consisted of a pledge by Warner Brothers to make a suitable payment if theatrical revenues fell short of covering the investment. The task of reconciling all these interlocking commitments proved a major headache.

One especially interesting and far-sighted aspect of the refinancing involved substantial insurance against the possibility that capital allowances, on which the whole deal was founded, might be discontinued or reduced. In fact, *Never Say Never Again* will not be a victim of the government's change of policy since the deal was completed well before budget day. Nevertheless, the amount of money involved in the syndication led to some difficulty in arranging reinsurance. Since there were no established lines of reinsurance, brokers had to scurry round the market to recruit firms prepared to assume part of the insurer's risk.

The scale of the risk in this 007 saga (a specifically fiscal risk, be it said, unrelated to its box-office performance) makes *Never Say Never Again* a special case. Tax indemnity clauses, however, have been a common feature of leasing deals since capital allowances were first introduced for films. If a film lease was being written with an independent producer or a small production company, the lessor would generally require some security against changes in the tax laws that might prejudice the advantages of the deal.

In the past, lessors have been criticised for this on the grounds that the protection was scarcely necessary and had the effect of excluding very small companies from participating in sale and leaseback operations. Only the big companies, parts of multi-national enterprises, could afford to shoulder the cost of the tax indemnity clauses, so it was felt that the smaller, impecunious companies were disadvantaged. In the light of this year's budget, however, that little extra insurance proves to have been eminently wise.

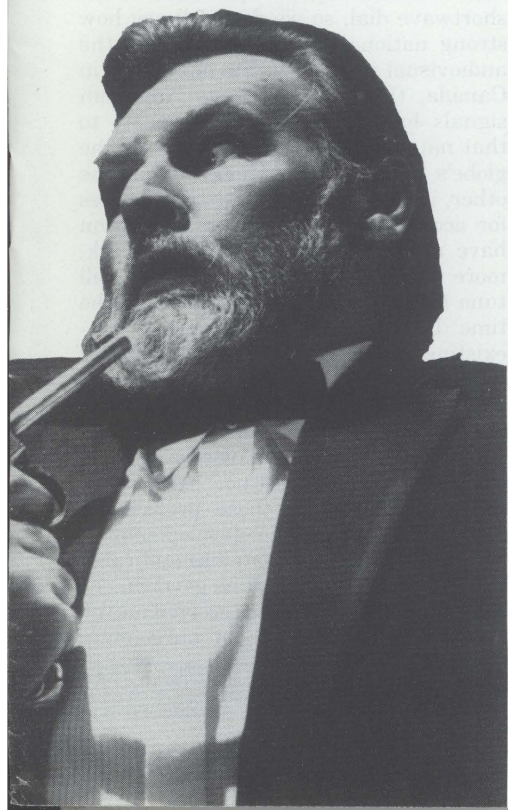
Indirectly, the phasing out of capital allowances also demonstrates that this concession and the leasing packages to which it gave rise were never quite as important to the British film renaissance as some have maintained. Al Clark, head of production at Virgin Vision, which has become, over the past two years, one of the fastest growing film units in Britain, certainly takes that view. 'The loss of allowances,' he says, 'will restrict a number of things we can do and may well end up being a curb on what we can

produce. Even so, capital allowances are not everything, they are just an extra incentive. After all, as an entertainment group, there is a limit to the number of allowances you can use. The real cross-roads will come in two years' time, when the allowances are phased out. I don't think it will eliminate a lot of investors, though it may result in a degree of caution. What it is most likely to mean is that films will just have to be made in a slightly different way.'

David Puttnam, five of whose first seven films were funded with help from the National Film Finance Corporation and whose name, willy nilly, is more closely associated than most with the new British cinema, has firm ideas about how to fill the gap after the end of 100 per cent allowances. 'I've never liked the idea,' Puttnam says, 'that the industry, in whole or in part, was having to rely on such a flimsy device as capital allowances. What I'd much rather see is their replacement by a whole series of mechanisms to encourage production. They could, for example, be part and parcel of the business expansion scheme, or expenditure on film could be made an allowable expense against the levy for television contractors. And it should not be an insuperable problem to permit write-offs as incurred.' At present, they come into effect when an asset is brought into use, but a switch to an as-incurred basis takes place for expenditure incurred on or after 1 April 1985.

None of these changes, David Puttnam believes, would require major alterations in legislation. This ought to commend them to a Conservative government that is eager not to give the impression that it is intervening in business. Channel 4, like David Puttnam a leading force in the British renaissance, is not wholly persuaded that the removal of 100 per cent allowances is a bad thing. Reliance on tax shelters, it believes, is unhealthy for any industry. It is not necessary to be a government supporter to accept that part of the argument. The question is whether the British film industry is sturdy enough to walk unaided (for example, without an Eady fund or an NFFC).

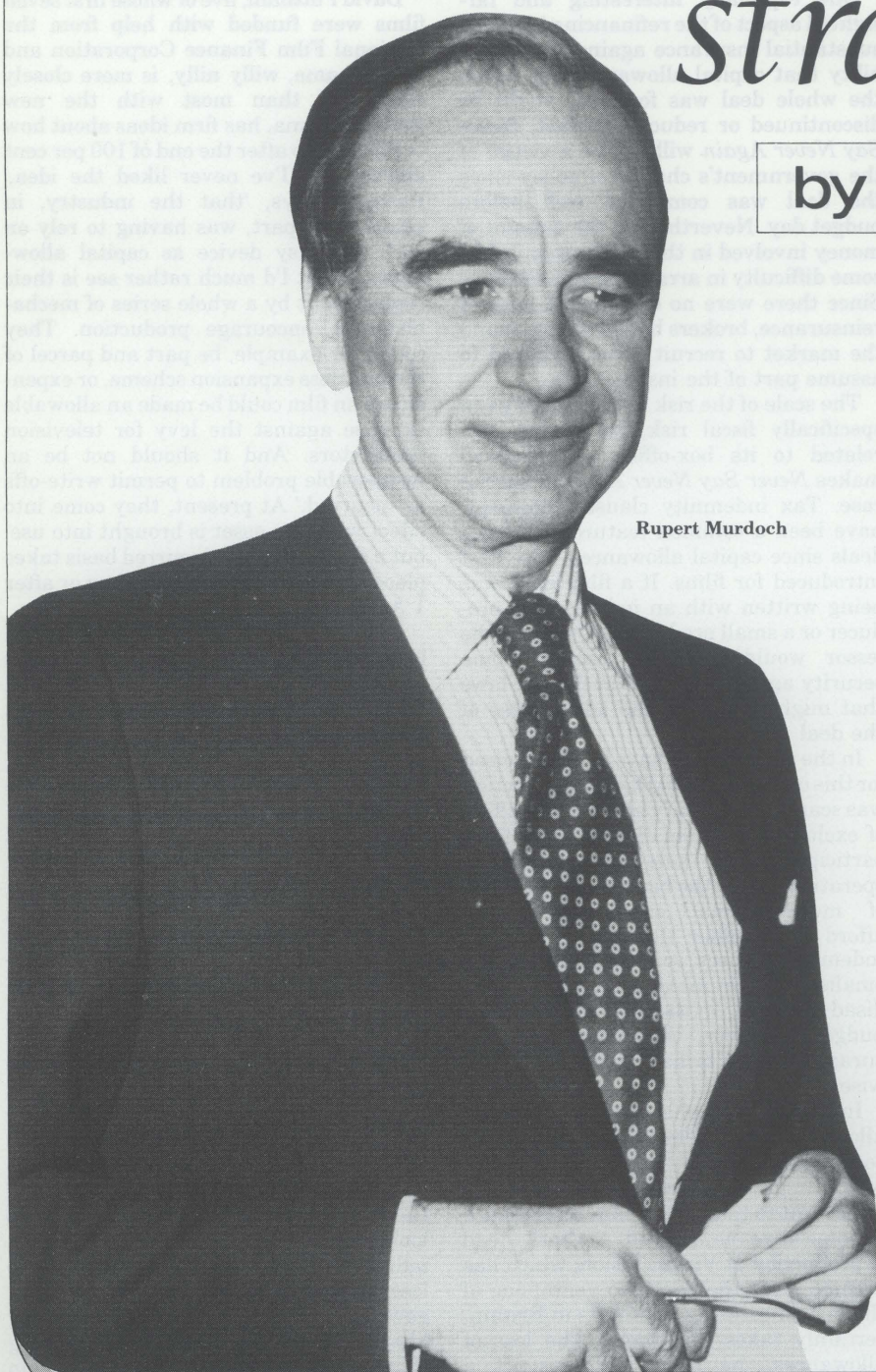
Kenneth Baker, the minister whose responsibilities include the film industry, had yet to deliver his long awaited white paper when the Chancellor scrapped 100 per cent allowances. Taken in conjunction, the expected Baker proposals and the Lawson measures were starting to look like a concerted attack on the industry—to those, at least, with most to lose. It may be, however, that this bit of government policy is doing something like its job. It seems to be encouraging those with gumption and ingenuity to find imaginative ways out of a desubsidised environment. ■



HOW RUPERT MURDOCH DISCOVERED THE TRUTH ABOUT AMERICAN MEDIA

'Love ye therefore the stranger'

by Brian Winston



Rupert Murdoch

Nothing speaks so clearly to a misunderstanding of the nature of media as the BBC's motto, 'Nation Shall Speak Peace Unto Nation'. The BBC, like every other institution of broadcasting, speaks primarily within its own national borders and—pace the World Service—when it crosses the frontiers it does so, as often as not, in the name of war and propaganda. In this rather crude nationalism the world's broadcasters have been more than a little abetted by their audiences. Throughout the age of radio, most populations mainly preferred the material produced by their own system to anything they could have found by twiddling the shortwave dial.

On television, until now, there has been no technological equivalent of the shortwave dial, so we do not know how strong national loyalties will be to the audiovisual image. On the one hand, in Canada, the desire to have American signals has contributed enormously to that nation's front runner status as the globe's most cabled nation; but on the other, in Belgium, where similar desires for access to the neighbours' television have also led to a vast cable network, more than two-thirds of subscribers still tune to the national output most of the time. In nations where there is no pre-existing appetite for the wholesaling of foreign channels, such as Britain, there is as yet no data. The degree to which national audiences will remain loyal to national audiovisual images is thus an open question. It has not been much addressed, although these preferences are constraints on the development of both direct broadcast satellite and cable systems as least as great as government controls. The latter have received all the attention in debates about burgeoning

television distribution systems because they can be more easily grasped. Government policies are also more susceptible to lobbying than is the public taste.

Governments have believed from the dawn of the age of electronic communications that a nation's vital interests are involved in the development and ownership of telecommunications systems. This belief exerts a tremendous influence on all aspects of telecommunications. It accounts for the existence of parallel satellite and transoceanic cable telephones. It justifies limitations on programme importation, such as those behind which British television has flourished for nearly forty years. It allows the American broadcasting and telephone industries to operate internally without any international competition. It governs the radio jamming policies of the Eastern bloc. It accounts for the desire, which all new nations exhibit, for autonomous systems. The incorporeal nature of these ephemeral messages has not prevented them from attracting the most protectionist of policies.

The concept of vital national interest, by which states mould telecommunications, was first openly enunciated by an American president 109 years ago. 'I was unwilling,' stated Ulysses S. Grant in 1875, 'to yield to a foreign state the right to say that its grantees might land on our shores while it denied a similar right to our people to land on its shores.' The occasion was the threatened arrival of the first French telegraph cable. Grant's principles effectively updated the notion of inviolate borders for the age of international electronic communications. They have stood at the foundation of the entire edifice of national and international policies. Grant's price of admission to the French was that American telegraph companies be allowed to share in the French cable. With that genius for blabbergab that has never deserted American life, this essentially restrictive practice became known as the 'open shores' policy. It means the exact opposite.


Imperial interests and a monopoly on gutta-percha ensured British dominance of the system in which Grant was eager to get an American footing. Gutta-percha, a natural latex, was the best substance for keeping the ocean out of Victorian submarine cables and it came from trees that flourished in British Malaya. The world's transoceanic telegraph system depended on it.

There was no competition for these wires until the advent of the transatlantic radio telephone in 1927. The next stage, an undersea wire capable of carrying a human voice, was a long time coming, the first being open for business only in 1956. The technology of the transoceanic telephone circuit was quite evenly distributed among the developed

nations, and in these last decades many such cables have been laid. But 1956 was also the year of Sputnik, the first satellite. The United States, in responding to Sputnik, produced a parallel, American dominated, and much under-used satellite-based international telephone system. It does three things the cables don't—it serves the needs of the American imperium for a closely controlled worldwide communications system; it can carry television; and, should you be making a call, it's the channel that echoes.

This is the international framework, replete with complex agreements about radio spectrum use, cartel pricing arrangements and protections to national hegemonies. This framework conditions domestic arrangements. It is the background that must never be forgotten when the talk turns to 'deregulation'. The framework, for all that it is virtually undebated, limits the deregulators and undermines their logic.

And here is to be found the real point of



American soap opera: Rupert Murdoch and 'the great corporateness'

such purely American soap operas as Rupert Murdoch's aborted bid for Warner Communications—rather than the \$50m profit he made by losing. For Murdoch's failure entirely turned on aspects of American telecommunications regulation that not even the most avid of Reaganite broadcasting deregulators has got round to questioning. Murdoch was nothing less than the victim of a ramification of the open shores policy, the bit which states that only American citizens can own American broadcasting stations.

At first sight—and indeed at second—Murdoch's moves to acquire Warner can scarcely be comprehended as sound business. Warner, 'the great corporateness' as a friend who works there calls it, is divided into various parts, each one apparently in worse shape than the last. There is the more or less average entertainment conglomerate based on the old movie business and including records and publishing. But then there is also the high tech end, videogames and computers, cable systems and satellite-distributed programme services. Of the

whole \$3.6 billion entity, analysts suggested that only the old film library was worth the bidding.

The analysts needed little insider information to reach this conclusion, since most things Warner owns are losing money. Atari computers are among the sufferers of the 'information revolution' shakeout. This division lost \$536m in the first nine months of last year. The cable systems have lost \$100m and are currently in debt to the tune of \$700m more. The cable programming business is in little better shape. Warner's premium movie channel has been absorbed by *Showtime*, the number two in the field. Its children's service, *Nickelodeon*, has been forced to accept ads, thus destroying much of its attractiveness. Its much heralded music channel, *Music Television* (MTV), would be in trouble if it ever had to pay for its programming, having only now made its first small profit. This good news immediately occasioned increased pressure from the record companies on MTV to cough up. One of every three workers in the video area has been sacked in the last year. They might as well have been employed by US Steel Inc.

Warner was vulnerable to Murdoch because none of these interests, although regulated, is deemed vital enough to warrant the very closest of controls. So Warner bought itself some protection, and in so doing turned Murdoch's blandishments into an offer it could refuse. Warner bought some broadcasting stations.

In a friendly deal 25 per cent of Warner's shares were exchanged for 46 per cent of the shares of a company called Chris-Craft Industries. Chris-Craft, which long ago limited itself to the manufacture of small pleasure boats, is run by an extant agent, Herbert H. Seigel, a man with a yen to be in movies. (He once failed in an attempt to buy Paramount.) The company's main assets are no longer boats but six television stations with revenues of over \$150m a year.

These six stations immediately altered the Murdoch deal. They gave Warner two levels of protection. First, Warner used the prohibition against foreign ownership, in the event successfully, to stop Murdoch. If that had failed, a second level of protection was in place because Murdoch would have been forced to divest himself of some key newspapers. Chris-Craft's TV stations were in cities where Murdoch has papers, and the elaborate and rigorously enforced cross-ownership rules prohibit single proprietors of print and broadcasting (or, indeed, broadcasting and cable or any other combination) in any one market.

The Americans have never been shy about protecting broadcasting. Radio was a British invention (in that Marconi chose to incorporate in the UK). After the First World War, the US Navy acted as a prime mover in dispossessing the

American Marconi Company of its patent rights. Out of that row the Radio Corporation of America was born. The British have always been less insistent in these matters. When EMI was formed some years later, it included the British subsidiary of RCA, and General Sarnoff, the RCA chairman, was given a place on the EMI board. (The result of this open-handedness was that EMI had all the RCA television patents, which Sarnoff was prevented from exploiting because of rival commercial interests in the States. That's one reason why the BBC was so early on the TV scene—in fact second only to the Germans, in 1936, in inaugurating a public service.)

But beyond nationalism, Warner's ploy in defeating Murdoch exploited the rules and regulations governing the American media market; which rules and regulations, contrary to British understanding, are complex, extensive and, it would seem in some circumstances at least, enduring. If there is no direct government intervention, there are always the residual powers of the anti-trust laws, powers which people are nothing loath to invoke. These powers have recently been used to break up the world's largest corporation, AT&T, the phone company. In essence, the system makes the rules which mediate between warring baronies, and only those elements ineffective at mounting lobbies are left out. Consumers, for instance. Thus Mark Fowler, the head of the Federal Communications Commission and a convinced deregulator, is intent on removing the limited and minor controls that exist for the 'Kidvids'—the soul-destroying parade of scarcely animated cartoons that separate the toy and cereal commercials on Saturday mornings. As *Variety* eloquently headlined his moves in this direction, 'FOWLER'S FCC TELLS KIDS TO GET LOST'.

It is things like this that feed the American free-media-enterprise myth, but such are by no means the whole story. There is a measure of mealy-mouthed hypocrisy here as can be seen by comparing this pronouncement on children's television (against which only the usual footling liberal pressure groups protested) with the struggle to remove the 'First Run Syndication Rules'. Over a decade ago, the FCC intervened to prevent the networks gobbling up the entire American television system. For a variety of reasons the big three had achieved freedom from the sponsors, who had really cracked the whip in the early years. Now they were about to break the independence of the programme suppliers, Hollywood. Had they done so, the argument runs, they would have starved the smaller television stations of product by simply not selling to them. That would have been fatal because the independent TV stations need 'off-

network' programming as the only sure-fire popular thing they have.

To prevent all this from happening, the FCC made a rule forbidding the networks to buy outright the programmes they showed. The networks took all the risks, paid for the pilots, came up with the budgets; but every show, after they had finished with it, reverted to the producers, who were then free to sell it in the second, syndication, market. In stark contrast to the notion of the free market, prime-time American television simply does not belong to the people who pay for its production. All they have for their pains is a limited licence. Fowler, of course, wants none of this. In the name of deregulation, his view is that if the networks run the whole system, so be it. But the smaller TV stations and Hollywood very much want the rule retained. To fight for it Hollywood created the best named committee in the history of mealy-mouthery—'The Committee for Prudent Deregulation'.

The good old CFPD is not without friends in high places. The President of

hell' to get involved in the matter—but the President's luck is holding. Nobody seems to know or care about this obscure ideological volte face.)

'First Run Syndication' is not the only rule, and it is certainly not the only rule likely to survive Chairman Fowler. There is, for instance, the 'Prime-Time Access Rule'. The first half-hour of prime-time was taken from the networks and given to their local affiliates to programme directly. The purpose was, again, to achieve a better balance between the networks and other parts of the system. A subsidiary aim was to encourage local programming. By removing half an hour of commercials the networks were certainly affected, but not disastrously. By giving the locals a half-hour to programme, though, very little was achieved, since most bought cheap Hollywood game shows which had otherwise disappeared from the prime-time schedule. Any moves to wipe this rule from the books would no doubt occasion a vigorous response from the prudent deregulators in the 'creative community'.

Each part of the industry is strictly in favour of only those rules that protect its own interests and righteously against any rules that inhibit it. It's the sound of righteous indignation that really grates. The FCC and the courts have always acted to preserve stability within the system. The failure of the ideologically motivated deregulators (and the profit-bent networks) to remove the 'First Run Syndication Rules' in the present climate is the proof of that. The desire for stability is why the FCC has almost never deprived a station of a broadcasting licence. (Contrary to myth, though, licences have been very occasionally denied.) But the general non-performance of the FCC as a public watchdog and its current deregulatory stance have created the impression of a system without controls. Add to this a total unwillingness to consider content, because of the free speech provisions of the First Amendment, and the myth is born.

Yet the truth is that the controls are there, as much as in any other nation state and for exactly the same reasons. They are just exercised differently, as the networks (yet again) and Rupert Murdoch (for the first time) have been finding out. It was against vital national interest for Murdoch, as an Australian, to acquire six of America's 774 TV stations.

The Federal Communications Commission lacks a motto of the BBC sort. 'Open shores and open skies' would do at a pinch. Commissioner Fowler seems to like something along the lines of: 'The Public Interest Is What Interests The Public.' I would prefer a biblical sentiment: 'Love ye therefore the stranger.' (And if the FCC doesn't want it, it could surely serve the new UK cable authority.)

Rules, regulations and the myth of American free enterprise

the United States has had, in his time, to do with the movie business and he told the runaway Fowler to back off for at least two years. (The President in his time was also a kid, but that, unfortunately, seems to count for less.) A period of dealing has ensued. The networks said they will settle for 49 per cent of the syndication monies earned by 'their' prime-time shows, a suggestion which has an air of desperation since they are clearly losing an argument which—given the supposed deregulation climate of the day—they were the dead-cert favourites to win. Current feeling is that in two years, at the end of the moratorium, the issue will be dead and the rule will still be in place, whoever is in the White House. Hollywood's success in fighting, in this day and age, for a regulation proves that there is a Santa Claus after all. Amid the dying embers, the House Commerce Committee is going to investigate whether or not President Reagan acted improperly in persuading the FCC to lay off. (Barry Goldwater told the President that 'he was crazier than



Leslie Woodhead
has been filming
episodes for the
Granada series
Television,
a world survey
to be transmitted
in Spring 1985.

A Television Diary by Leslie Woodhead

India

A party on our second evening in Delhi. 'What sort of people live here?' we ask the taxi driver as we arrive. 'Rich people,' he says. It's true. Our host sells tyres, a hurricane air conditioner pins us to our seats, men huddled together, women at a distance. We're introduced to a young man who tells us he's an importer of video recorders. He uses his own video to record programmes for the servants, he says. A couple of days later he takes us on an instructive tour of his friends' video set ups. A succession of handsome houses, the new-looking Japanese video recorders always installed in the bedrooms. One bedroom has two recorders. Titles include *Carry on Camping*, *The Professionals*, *Yes, Minister* and an ancient *World of Sport* with David Coleman enthusing over a long-forgotten football match. One family does have a big collection of Indian feature films, but the hottest tape in town is this week's episode of *Dallas* just flown in from New York. A video addict expresses genuine surprise when we point out that his machine has the capacity to record Indian television. The possibility has never been considered by him or any of his friends, it seems. Grandfather tells us

television is destroying society. 'I call it TB, not TV,' he says.



It seems that other Indian viewers of Doordarshan, Indian Television, also have their reservations, though on somewhat different grounds. One Indian critic wrote recently of Doordarshan, 'The tedium is the message', and the single government channel does appear to offer pretty spartan fare on the evenings we watch. On the credit side, India must be one of the world's least colonised countries in terms of television imports. Apart from some aged American commercials, only *I Love Lucy* and, inexplicably, *Father Dear Father* currently invade the Indian schedules. Sadly, the local mix of low budget development television hardly seizes the space. It can't be surprising that the thrice-weekly injection of Hindi movies, escapist musicals of real vitality, wins an audience six times the size of anything else on Indian tv. 'I think it could be bolder,' Mrs Gandhi says in our interview.

In Gujerat State we do find that bolder version of Indian television, alive and

well. Kheda tv, an offshoot of India's pioneering 'Site' satellite broadcasting experiment of the mid-70s, has its headquarters amid the well-watered lawns of the Indian space research centre in the city of Ahmedabad, where Gandhi had his base and camels still plod through the traffic jams. Under the direction of a dynamic young Sikh called B. S. Bhatia, Kheda tv have built a unique service, broadcasting to some 400 villages in the area. What's remarkable about Kheda is the vigour with which they have insisted on relevance to their village audience. A team of bright young researchers tours the area, constantly tapping the real concerns of their viewers and trying to construct programmes that will connect.

On a blazing day in early summer, we batter up the alarming Bombay road dodging killer buses and big monkeys squatting on the tarmac to see the Kheda policy in action. Today's location is Shekadi, a pleasant place of solid two-storey houses in lime green and pink, dusty lanes and wandering cows. Around one house, a crowd of kids signals the Kheda crew and an extraordinary scene. Armed with the latest lightweight video equipment, the Kheda team are recording a play. The impact of new technology in this remote and undeveloped place is striking enough, but here too the play's the thing. The play was written by a villager and it's being acted by villagers.



Indian village drama: the Granada crew film the Kheda crew at work.

It's about a subject of cruel importance to the villagers—bride burning.

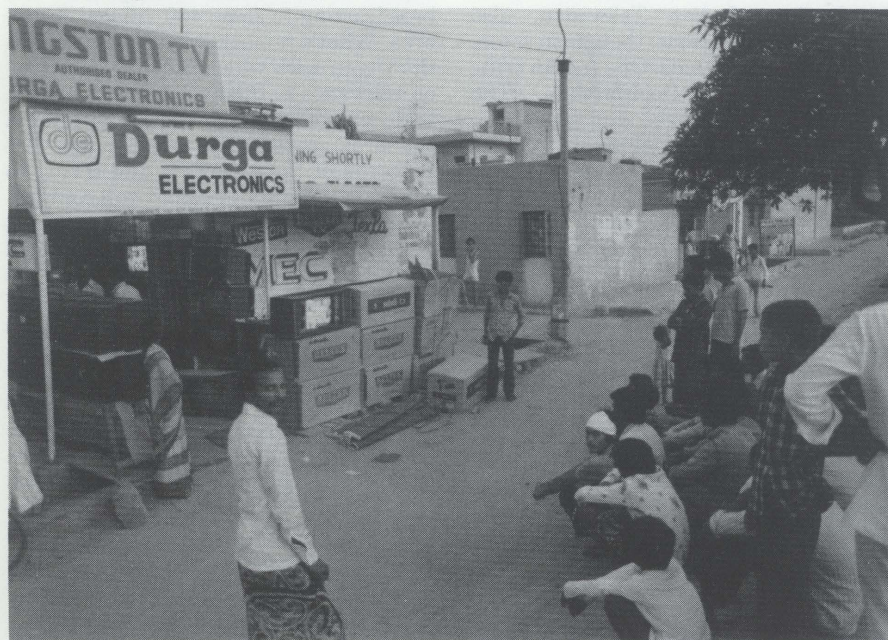
With the thermometer nudging 114 degrees inside the house, we film a scene where a beautiful village girl is about to have petrol poured over her by her father-in-law and husband, who are furious that she hasn't brought a big enough dowry. Despite the two crews crammed into the roasting little room, our old-style film and Kheda's new video, the scene has an appalling conviction. Just as the husband strikes a match, there's a knock on the door and the bride's father arrives to save her. But the village dramatist has a message. The bride refuses to go with her

father, saying between sobs that she must stay and fight. It's a moment that transcends melodrama to create the most powerful and relevant documentary drama I can recall. It seems Kheda regularly make drama written and acted by villagers to explore difficult themes like caste and land ownership.

Afterwards we talk to the writer and to the actors and actresses. The writer simply says that it happened here and he hopes the play will help to make things change. The old lady who played the bride's mother-in-law tells how she was first approached by Kheda when she was driving her bullocks home and told them

to go away. Now she has acted in many Kheda plays. At the end of the scorching day, fuelled for us by 112 bottles of orange juice, we join the villagers in the square to watch television. The set is installed behind locked doors in the wall of the milk co-operative building. At 7.30 sharp a village official unlocks the doors and the crowd sits in the dust watching the news in Gujarati. Then there's a Kheda documentary on unemployment, and suddenly everyone gets up and runs away into the darkness. It seems there's a fight in the village—a useful lesson for any TV producer about the difficulties of holding an audience against rival attractions. The next morning in the Ahmedabad paper, there's a story about a woman arrested for killing her new daughter-in-law by burning because she brought too small a dowry.

Television shop in an Indian village.



Some Indian TV snapshots. In a poor Delhi suburb, a crowd stands transfixed outside a very new television shop watching the Sunday evening Hindi movie on a set installed outside. One of the crowd is a little boy on a white horse covered in tiny mirrors on his way to a wedding... A poor father tells us he bought a TV set so his daughter would stay at home in the evenings... In a street market in Bombay, alongside stalls crammed with old surgical scissors and antique brass gramophone horns, a crowd stares at a TV set. It plays music, but the screen is blank...

Out into the scorched countryside of Uttar Pradesh to film the team from *Krishi Darshan*, Indian TV's long-running

agricultural magazine programme started nearly 20 years ago by Mrs Gandhi. They're recording material about Government wheat procurement, their new red video camera operated by a man in jeans and sunglasses clashing outrageously with a medieval tableau of

gnarled men in sheets and bare feet tramping in wheat and dust. I get a terrific bash on the thigh from a passing cow and then we're off again on the crew bus across a vast featureless plain. We screech to a stop as *Krishni Darshan's* producer spots some threshing activity in

a tiny compound. The farmers continue threshing without pause or interest as we circle with our crazy tangle of cameras and mikes. We interview three men under a tree sharing a six-foot pipe. Yes, they see tv, including *Krishni Darshan*. They prefer Hindi movies. We move on.

The Philippines

Crawling into Manila through the permanent trafficjam. As we're becalmed again alongside a twenty-foot Coke bottle, tiny boys risk the cars hustling newspapers with big red headlines that scream 'Revenge' and 'Twenty-three headless bodies discovered'. On the hotel set, Philippines television tells the same story. Five channels pump out California into the South China Sea on a blazing afternoon. On the *700 Club*, Terri Dawn Clark tells how the Lord saved her from arthritis, replacing her legs with 'brand new baby-like bone'. *Spiderman* jostles with the *Dionne Warwick Show* and *The Incredible Hulk*. After the austerities of Indian television the overload is awful—and seductive.

Narcisco Padilla tells me how he found Jesus on television on 1 August 1977. He came home from the office in Manila and found the *700 Club* on television. It changed his life, and as he's a millionaire, Mr Padilla is trying to save others through television. His skyscraper headquarters in Manila proclaims the words 'Glory to God' over a new business area, and Mr Padilla has spent millions to build his own born-again tv station on the 14th floor of the skyscraper. He completed all the legal requirements, but sadly failed to get one vital signature—that of President Marcos. It seems his uncle is a political opponent of the President. For two years now 'Hallelujah tv' has remained under plastic sheets in Mr Padilla's studios, new cameras waiting to be born again alongside a big wooden cross. Meanwhile Mr Padilla spends 70,000 pesos a month on making religious television in rented studios with a director who murmurs 'Praise the Lord' between shots. We film a sequence of Mr Padilla and a studio guest praying for businessmen. In an interview afterwards, he speaks out quietly against the 'filth' of Philippines television. After the years of negotiation, he has decided to leave the problem of his tv station 'to the Lord'.

A live lunchtime show in the studios of RPN 9, the Philippines' leading channel. The show is called *Eat Bulaga* and it's a remarkable spectacle, a chaotic and engaging mix of music and chat and shamelessly intrusive commercials for Coca-Cola, relayed by satellite to 47 million Filipinos on 7,000 islands, six days a week, one and three-quarter hours

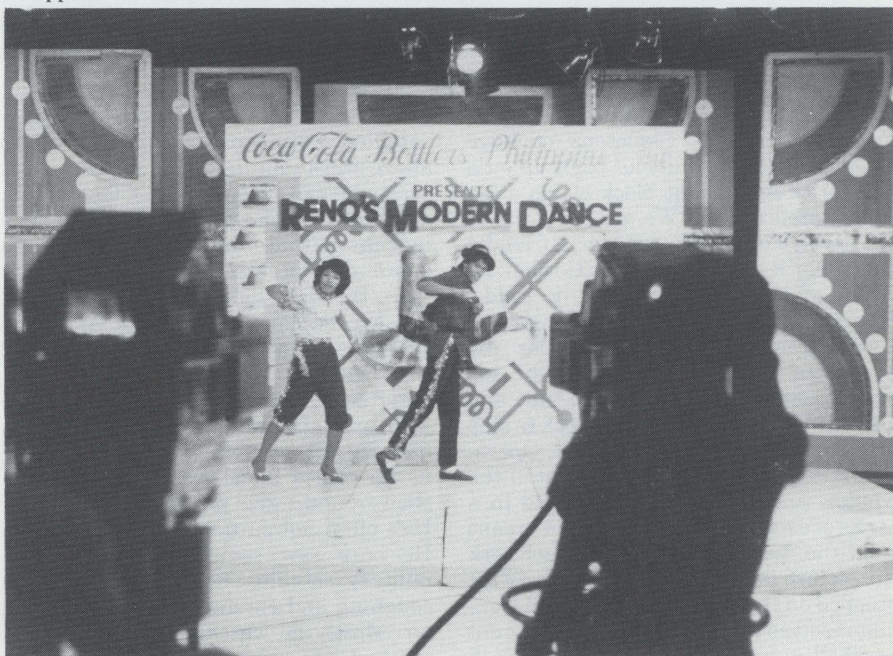
every day. An audience of 200 teenage girls with rippling fans watches gravely while canned laughter roars out on their behalf. The frantic hosts speak Taglish, a mind-softening mix of Filipino and English where liquid phrases are suddenly interspersed with half sentences about 'David Bowie' or 'Carnation tinned milk'. In the middle of some hilarious item, there's a sudden message about missing children. During another feature on skin care advising viewers not to sleep with diseased people, the hostess breaks into a commercial for skin cream. Serious kids in primary colours compete in robot dancing, two teenage John Denver lookalikes in stetsons and glasses join battle over 'Annie's Song'. A tiny boy wins 100 pesos from Carnation Milk for spinning a top. In the control room the label on the LAUGHTER button is almost worn away.

A few yards from RPN 9's tidy headquarters at 'Studio City', we film in a warren of shacks around an open sewer. Huts made of tin and bits of exhausted wood teeter over an unspeakable ditch, but most roofs sprout an ambitious tv aerial. We call on a father and his children watching tv in their bare wooden box. Like everyone in this terrible place, they are gracious and hospitable despite our intrusion. They're watching an old movie interspersed with

commercials for Swiss watches and personal showers. On one side of their door are lurid posters of Mr and Mrs Marcos on golden thrones. On the other side is a photo of Marcos meeting President Reagan. Over the door is Jesus in a blue robe. On a wall outside, someone has chalked 'God is Love'. People smile and say 'Hey Joe'. But though they're tolerant beyond reason of our invasion, we do get a final hint of the fierce ironies of life here. As we negotiate our way back over the sewer, we overhear a woman saying to a friend, 'They've come to admire our view.'

After a routinely terrifying tangle with Manila's kamikazi traffic, we're at Channel Four, would you believe the Philippines' newest tv station. If you think that's a dotty little coincidence, stand by. Channel Four's controller tells us that his problem is he has a Government mandate to make minority programmes but that's giving him headaches because his shows don't get big enough ratings to satisfy the advertisers... Actually Manila's Fourth Channel boss does have one extra problem unfamiliar in Charlotte Street. His is formally labelled the 'Government Channel' and he spends a good deal of his time being summoned to the Presidential palace for a chat with Marcos. He tells us he thinks tv in the Philippines is a total disaster and should be scrapped and started on a new basis. He favours the BBC model, though it isn't clear how they'd view that at the palace after a critical and much-resented BBC docu-

Philippines television: Coca-Cola and a dance number.



mentary made here last year. But for all his bewildering pressures, the controller is quite sure about one thing—viewers like the ones we just visited in the sewer aren't seduced by glamorous commercials. They know their place, he says.

On breakfast television at 8 a.m., a curious encounter. Surely it's not just early morning befuddlement, but the programme looks oddly familiar. That's because I made it. I've never thought of offering it to tv-am but it seems someone in Manila considers *Collision Course*, a drama documentary about the Zagreb mid-air disaster I made in 1979, just the thing to wake up to. Sitting in a hotel bedroom 8,000 miles from home listening to my own commentary voice is an odd experience, but Philippines transmission habits do offer some new perspectives. The incredibly scratched commercials are bulldozed into the programme on a

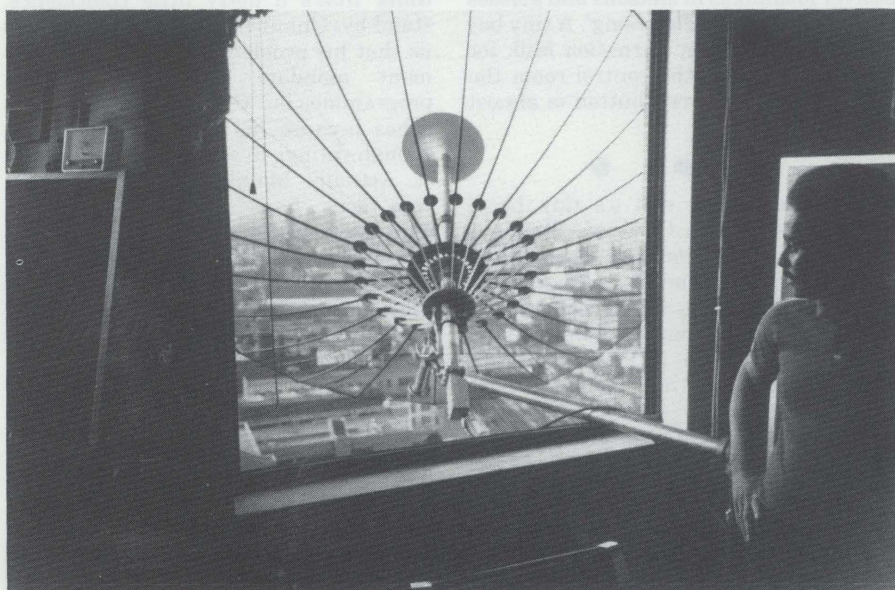
completely random basis, often interrupting a speech in mid-word. God knows what the audience in that sewer village will make of this alternative *Collision Course*. There's a strange footnote to this strange reunion. Later that day we meet the head of the channel who transmitted my film and I claim paternity. He looks uncomfortable. Back in London, we discover why—he hasn't paid for it.

A Sunday lunchtime drink with the Godfather of Philippine television in the garden where it all began. It's a location out of an Asian *Dallas*, a huge swimming pool, ornamental arcades, hovering servants swishing flies with paper mops, and family lunch for forty on the terrace. As eight grandchildren of varying sizes come up to deliver kisses on the cheek, Judge Antonio Quirino tells us how he started Philippine television in this garden thirty years ago. At that time

his brother was the President of the Philippines, and as the children splash in the pool, the Judge calmly unfolds an incredible tale of plot and betrayal in high places, featuring deals with communist guerrillas, CIA subversion and allegations of murder attempts in an American hospital.

The Judge is startlingly straightforward about why he started tv in 1953. His presidential brother was a sick man and he needed some way to push his campaign without travelling. The first programme was a televised dinner party from this garden. But despite the assistance of television, his brother lost the election, and the Judge quickly lost the transmitter aerial in his back garden and got slammed for three million pesos in tax by the new Government. Still, he seems to have survived. As more grandchildren come up to offer a kiss, the Judge tells us how he used to dandle the infant President Marcos on his knee.

United States



Mark Gordon with his dining-room window satellite dish.

Out into the South Bronx, alarming in morning sunshine. Skeletons of huge dead cars squat in rubble. High up on a pink brick apartment block clings a big silver satellite dish. We are taken up to see the dish by its proud owner, a friendly young black man called Mark Gordon. At close quarters it's engagingly crude. Hanging outside his dining-room window, the eight-foot dish holds the Manhattan skyline in its mesh. It's simply lashed to a bit of metal tube and weighted down by a concrete block to stop it falling 23 floors into the street. Operation is basic—Mark just leans out of the window and jerks the dish around in a series of excruciating squeaks and groans from the metal mounting. At each jerk the picture on the black and white tv set propped on the dining-room table flickers and resolves into a new head, a different baseball game, another preacher. Each

groaning twitch points the dish at a new satellite waiting patiently 22,300 miles above Mark's dining-room. As a result, it seems he can receive over 300 channels. Although he doesn't seem to know a megahertz from a milk bottle top, he's a supremely successful video pirate.

On the right-hand side of his window, he says he can tap eighteen American satellites, each with 24 channels, and three satellites from Canada. On the left-hand side, just before the dish hits the wall, are Europe and Asia, though he's a bit hazy about where to point. Mark tells us he comes home every night, has a shower, and starts playing with his dish. He's often not sure what he's watching. He once saw something odd from a military satellite; he sees newsreaders coughing and cursing before they go on air. Mostly he watches free movies and sports. He has generously cabled up three



Satellite dish at top window.

of his neighbours to share his signal. He tells us he sometimes wakes up at dawn in his pyjamas, still hugging the dish.

At the end of a forgettable road called Memory Lane, we find the place at last. It doesn't look very promising—another shopping precinct in the Southern



Memory Lane: the office of Soaps by Phone.

Californian suburban wilderness. One of the anonymous new shops has a newly painted message—'Soaps by Phone'. In a large bare room, three college graduates sit gazing at three little tv sets, transcribing the plots of America's 13 daytime soap operas. Their one-minute summaries are then recorded by an announcer with a soapy voice, and for 12 dollars a year subscribing addicts who missed today's instalment on tv can phone in for their daily fix.

The President of Soaps by Phone is an impeccably groomed *Dallas*-style heroine, bronzed and friendly. She tells us she dreamed up the idea six months ago when she was trapped in a freeway traffic jam and couldn't make it home in time for her favourite soap. She opened for business here a fortnight ago and she's 'really excited' about the potential. It looks as though the excitement is well-founded, as we film today's summaries roll out in their cassettes while hundreds of soap-deprived Americans phone impatiently for further news of complex adulteries, lurid illnesses, corporate deceptions and small-town bitchiness. We film Brian the announcer recording a new consignment of soap, hot from the screen: 'And on Friday's *The Young and the Restless* on CBS, it appears that Rick's first wife Melissa drowned in a scuba accident. However, the plot thickens. Meanwhile Rick and Nicky bask in the afterglow of a passionate night of love-making. Kirsty is still in a coma...'

An evening with the Berkeley chapter of the 'Couch Potatoes'. In a room of profound but comfortable squalor four men sprawl rapt in front of two tv sets, both blaring out their conflicting stories. Between the men and the sets is a hideous still-life of congealed fast food, donuts, dips and cookies, cans of beer and vile soft drinks. The men wear battered dressing gowns over t-shirts announcing them as 'Couch Potatoes', via a cartoon of a potato sitting on a couch watching tv. They barely acknowledge the presence of

our film crew, gazing over our shoulders as the two tellys rave on, a 1950s comedian on one and a new sitcom on the other. Eventually we distract one potato sufficiently to gather something about the creed of this curious ritual. The 'Couch Potatoes' are committed to celebrating the joys of obsessive television viewing. Their aim in life is to view—and to view heavily. The only important rules are not to block anyone else's view and not to talk. Women members, recruited while buying further supplies of fast food in the supermarket, are called 'Couch Tomatoes'. As we film there's a bad moment. I accidentally pull a plug and the sets go blank. Genuine consternation ripples through the couch potatoes until we quickly restore their life support systems and the ritual can continue. After that, we leave quickly. No one looks away to say goodbye.

The Preview Theatre on Sunset Boulevard in Hollywood is perhaps the

The Berkeley 'Couch Potatoes' in session.



most influential place in American television. For the past twenty years, nearly every new popular drama series has been test run here to try to get an early warning of the viewers' response. 'The Viewers' in this case are an ever-changing sample of 400 Californians recruited by phone from the Los Angeles sprawl. We film a Sunday evening session and it's a strange occasion.

Tonight's 400 guinea-pigs arrive innocent of their real purpose, to be instructed from the stage by yet another announcer with a voice of soap about what's expected of them. Attached to each seat, he tells them, is a small black box with a movable switch calibrated from 'very dull' to 'very good'. As they watch the offerings, the audience are to indicate their shifting responses by constantly twitching their switches. Upstairs in a control room, the massed twitchings are processed by a big old computer and spilled out on to miles of graph paper. But before the main business begins, the audience itself has to be calibrated to make sure they're unpolluted by individualists and freaks. Every audience is shown the same Mr Magoo cartoon to be certain they respond in the long-established patterns, laughing in the right places, yawning where they should. Tonight's lot are model specimens, the director of the theatre tells us as he scans the graphs. In the week of the Grenada invasion it must be a relief, because as the director says, audiences can be troublingly unpredictable at times of crisis. 'When Kennedy was assassinated,' he says, 'we got very low Magoos.'

Of course it's all big and serious business. In a fiercely competitive television system where ratings are everything and a single percentage point can mean 70 million dollars in revenue, you need all the help you can get. The director tells us of desperately tense previews with director and stars pacing the control room awaiting their judgments. Scripts are rewritten, actors sacked according to the smudgy dictates of the powerful 400.

Sadly, for all the science, success remains elusive. One network which has tested every new offering here this season has still not recorded a single hit.

The metal detector on the second gate at San Quentin prison howls in alarm as it locates a tiny tag on my trouser zip. We all laugh for reassurance, still thoughtful about the warning from our escort that the prison authorities will in no circumstances exchange us for an inmate in the event of our kidnap. If gunfire starts, we're to stop filming. We are here to talk to long-term prisoners who've been locked up for decades with only television to bring messages of the outside world.

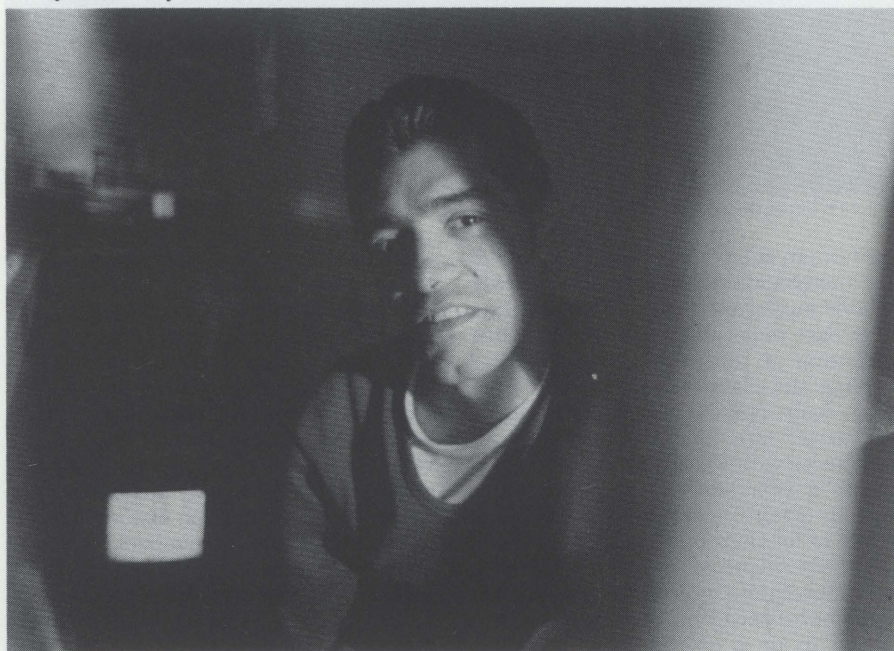
In the yard where George Jackson was shot dead, we interview 'Swede', who has been in prison for double murder since 1957. He hates violence on tv. The roof of death row sprouts a lamp that will glow when a man dies; alongside is a satellite tv dish. In the prison tv studio, we watch a murderer recording a maths lesson and see a cassette on aerobics tailored to fit the confines of your cell, hosted by a very sexy blonde and entitled 'Doing Your Stretch'. Finally, we reach a cell block. It's very noisy and very frightening. A wall of cages three storeys high is prowled by stocky guards with rifles. As we clamber up the metal stairway, scores of arms spring through the bars, each holding a small mirror to check who we are. We're told that most prisoners in San Quentin have been 'locked down' twenty-four hours a day for the past eighteen months since overcrowding has made the place so volatile. On the top tier, we reach Tony's cell. It's unbelievably and alarm-

ingly small, just a bed, a wash basin and a colour portable tv set.

Tony has so far served nineteen years for murder and has no release date. He was on death row for seven years. He's intelligent and very articulate about the power of television in prison. He followed the civil rights battles and flower power and Vietnam demonstrations of the 60s, and watched men on the moon. Watergate is a blank because he was denied access to a tv in those years. He got a credit for a Masters degree through watching *The Ascent of Man*, but he feels tv also helps the authorities by acting as

an opiate to damp down prison rebellion. Most inmates watch eighteen hours a day. We film through Tony's specially opened cell door, but midway through the interview a pretty black wardress regrets she has to slam the grill. We finish talking to Tony through the bars. He tells us that watching the fragment of lunar module left behind on the barren landscape of the moon as the astronauts took off for the earth, he had an overwhelming image of himself in this place. As we go along the metal corridors on our way back to the world, television glows behind bars.

San Quentin: Tony Lara at the door of his cell.



Brazil

Globo Television in Brazil is the fourth biggest tv company on earth, it seems, after the three American networks. What Globo mostly does is soap operas known here as Tele Novellas—at 6 o'clock, 7 o'clock, 8 o'clock and 10 o'clock, six nights a week, every week. There's an awful lot of soap in Brazil and it's hugely popular. At Globo's studios in Rio, right under the towering Christ Statue on Corcovado mountain, we film the soap factory at work. They're making *Champagne*, a new 8 o'clock novella about the convolutions of chic people who run a wine bar. The studio corridors are thronged with extras in dinner jackets and evening dresses, the studio has a huge and expensive wine bar set. It's a useful introduction to the world of Brazilian soap opera—opulent, escapist, successful.

An hour later we're filming a family of six living in a tiny wooden shed in a dangerous slum that clings to a hillside high above Ipanema beach. They're watching the 6 o'clock soap opera. No, they wouldn't like to see dramas about poor people like them—that would be boring and depressing. Commercials

featuring beautiful people flicker on their faces. Through a hole in the shed that serves as a window, the lights go up in the millionaire apartments along Ipanema beach. A couple of days later, Daniel Filho, the producer of *Malu Mulher* and Brazil's most prolific maker of popular drama, suggests a key. 'In Brazil we believe in miracles,' he says, 'and all soap operas have a character who is going up in the world, making it.' He once met the manager of Brazil's football team in the bank and they agreed that between them they provided the only permitted subjects for conversation in the Brazil of the Generals.

Jorge Adib is a merchandiser. What that means in Brazil is that he sells things via soap operas. He works as a consultant to Globo, suggesting how storylines and characters could be adjusted so as to inject commercial products into the nightly episodes. He shows us extracts where the main characters wear plastic sandals 'to improve the image of plastic'. A promotion for named jeans is studied by a character who's supposed to own a

boutique. Most striking of all, Mr Adib shows us an extract where a popular character is subtly recommended by a white-coated doctor to use a certain drug for his sclerosis—the drug company's name is never mentioned, but the company symbol sits prominently on the doctor's desk throughout the scene.

The possibilities for a discreet and productive relationship between advertiser and programme-maker go even further, it seems. Mr Adib tells us how a bank approached him asking if he couldn't come up with a soap series that would improve the image of bankers. The same day, we're able to film the result—*Eu Prometo*, the latest 10 o'clock novella, featuring the career of a good banker, played by Brazil's leading actor. In the scene we film, the banker is in hospital, having been shot during a prison visit. But in a powerful speech, he pledges himself to continue the fight for prison reform.

Our last day in Brazil provides an extraordinary spectacle—a massive public funeral for a beloved national figure. Tens of thousands of mourners pour through the streets to the cemetery to pay their respects. The object of this national feeling is the late Janete Clair—Brazil's most famous writer of soap operas. ■

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CANNES

Penelope Houston...

Last year, nobody at Cannes seemed able to talk of anything but the discomforts of the new Palais. This time conversation was back to normal: the weather (mostly wet); the films (rather too often likewise); the inescapable Cannon Group, who at their present rate of progress threaten by 1990 or so to be making all the films at the festival; the remarkable advertising revenue being pulled in by *Screen International* (some £0.75m, one gathers, in two weeks); the Salkind daily flypast, which has escalated from the single plane announcing *Superman One* to the fifteen thought necessary for trailing *Santa Claus*. Credit, however, where credit is due. The energetic mayor of Cannes, Mme Anne-Marie Dupuy, had pushed through some 30 million francs worth of refurbishment, making the Palais altogether lighter, brighter and safer as well as improving projection standards. Local authorities seldom react so swiftly and positively to criticism; others might note the example.

The films in the first week were a slightly shaky selection, with big names not exactly crashing but having some difficulty holding the road. Take, for instance, Theo Angelopoulos' *Voyage to Cythera*. This, though beginning somewhat as an essay in reality and art, with a film director (Julio Brogi) as it were inventing a character and his drama, gradually shifts, through what were apparently many script changes, into the story of a political exile returning after many years to Greece and the village of his wartime exploits. At the end, the old man finds himself in a highly symbolic plight, deported but with nowhere to go, marooned at sea on a floating concrete platform in mist and driving rain. For much of the film's first half, it seems that Angelopoulos has entered into some kind of unacknowledged competition with Tarkovsky as to who can keep actors walking at a slower pace. The harbour scenes, splendidly shot by Giorgios Arvanitis, are bleakly fine, with a troupe like the Travelling Players themselves bursting into the insalubrious setting of a dockside bar to stage a musical soirée in which 'As Time Goes By' is one of the items. But as a whole this handsome, expensive, puffed-up film remains the kind of white elephant which present festival and screening systems tend to preserve. Does anyone, including the Greek film industry, really need it?

Werner Herzog's *Where the Green Ants Dream* makes fewer demands, being considerably shorter. But Herzog seems at some risk of becoming the Flaherty of the 80s, journeying to remote parts of the world and devising on his own account any bits of folklore or tribal custom that the inhabitants may not have had the foresight to think up for themselves. His film, set on a pock-marked Australian plain, concerns Aborigines staging a sit-down protest against a mining company which has the misfortune to be drilling in

one of their holy places. The most bizarre and telling sequence finds a group of Aborigines squatting in a corner of a supermarket, where a sacred tree had stood until progress demolished it; a practice tolerated by the shop manager to the extent that he has obligingly surrounded their corner with his least marketable wares. But it turns out that green ants don't really behave in the arresting and poetic ways Herzog tells us they do, and if we can't trust his ants, can we trust his tribesmen? Herzog clearly has confidence in the wisdom of people who live close to the land, but it's too easy to follow the well-worn route of wisdom by association: the lined old faces in close-up; the occasional gnomic utterance. The whites, by predictable contrast, chatter away foolishly, particularly the actor charged with a remarkably doltish performance as the Australian solicitor general. Against what one assumes to be Herzog's intentions, the effect is curiously patronising.

Bergman, one feels, is likely to make any number of positively last appearances, although perhaps *After the Rehearsal* doesn't quite qualify among them, being a television work which might sit more easily on the small screen. A Bergmanic encounter on an empty stage, it involves a theatre director (Erland Josephson), tired but twinkling after a day on his fifth production of Strindberg's *Dreamplay*, a young actress (Lena Olin) who may be his daughter, and an ageing, drunken actress (Ingrid Thulin). Bergman dismantles character as others might strip down an engine while the talk goes on and on—about theatre, performance, reality, make-believe, all those topics that sustain the fascination of directors with actors, and actors' perennial fascination with themselves, but may well leave outsiders cold. Others, one should perhaps add, found more to admire in this characteristic exercise.

From Angelopoulos and Herzog and Bergman, much is expected. But directors who get their first efforts into the main competition, rather than into the more relaxed surroundings of the Quinzaine, as would probably have been the case a few years ago, are there to be shot at, and the wary might even do well to turn down the chance. Lars von Trier, a shaven-headed young Dane whose comments to the press sounded as headstrong and pretentious as his film, can probably look after himself. His *Element of a Crime*, played in English by Michael Elphick and the veteran Esmond Knight, is a lugubrious thriller of sorts, bathed in a baleful golden glow, and influenced powerfully but unprofitably by some of the showier aspects of Welles, Tarkovsky and others. The other debutant, Vincent Ward, was responsible for *Vigil*, the first New Zealand film to be shown in competition. This doleful, heavy-breathing film, about a little girl growing

up in odd, uncongenial company on a decaying and foggy farmstead, undoubtedly means well. 'I don't know if it's good or not,' its young director said wistfully. Sadly, it really isn't—or not good enough for the world's most competitive arena.

When films like this turn up in competition, one can only conclude that world cinema is in a more parlous state than we might have thought, that the wheel has mysteriously spun to give Denmark and New Zealand a turn, or that the selectors are employing a time-honoured betting method for big handicaps—stick in a pin and hope for the best. One can see more evident reason for the choice of Lino Brocka's *Bayan Ko*, about a young man who earns his living in a Manila printing works, but is driven to senseless crime by hardship, social pressures, etc. This is an honourable and brave film, touching en route on such questions as the problems of aspiring trade unionists and the plight of a wife stranded in hospital with her baby because her husband can't pay the bill. The trouble is that Lino Brocka has made livelier movies; and that as film (rather than social document) there is hardly anything on the screen which halfway experienced filmgoers won't have met fifty times before.

Perhaps, however, we are becoming a curmudgeonly lot. One of the assured pleasures of the first week was Bertrand Tavernier's *A Sunday in the Country*, in which an aged artist, superbly played by Louis Ducreux, is paid a Sunday visit by his two children, a nervous new woman of the 1912 vintage (Sabine Azema) and a staid businessman (Michel Aumont) with his wife and family. The old painter has settled for second best: he does honour-

ably what he has always done, knowing the artistic movements of his time have passed him by. And the film moves with complete ease and sure-footedness through its own version of the genre painting, sketching in character over the Sunday lunch, enjoying the 1912 car and the little walk to the station. It will, and should, give pleasure. But there was a widely expressed feeling that even if this was the best butter, Tavernier was spreading it rather too thickly, relying on the security of the past, the appeal of the secluded garden and the like.

Still, a film which sets out to please, and does so honestly, earns gratitude. There weren't too many of them. Out of competition, there was pleasure to be had from Mrinal Sen's *The Ruins*, one of his least didactic films, constructed to make the most of a setting of fallen splendour. Three friends come to spend a weekend in what was once the family home of the leader of the trio. Echoes, perhaps, of *Days and Nights in the Forest*, which are taken up in the tentative, edgy, undeveloped relationship between one of the young men and a girl who lives in a corner of the crumbling palace with her querulous, blind old mother. The film is perhaps a shade long and loose, but it is carried by Shabana Azmi's delicate performance and by the contrast between the city surroundings of the photographer's studio, where an experience exists in so far as it has been caught by a camera, and the jungle world of the ruins and their inhabitants, so photogenic but so elusive.

Marta Meszaros' *Diary* has been held up since 1982, and one can see why it might make officialdom a little nervous. The protagonist, Juli (Zsuzi Czinkoczi), is a wary, unforthcoming orphaned

teenager, brought back to Hungary from Russia in 1947 to live with Magda, a hardfaced woman who has done well out of the war and who is steadily advancing up the ladder of the Communist Party. Magda, when not stamping about in uniform, is prepared to sentimentalise over an adopted daughter; Juli rebels, making off on every possible occasion to the pictures (the autobiographical touch?) and transferring her allegiance to a surrogate father, a Communist of the wrong colour who is arrested during these Stalinist years. Shot in black and white by Miklos Jancsó, the film is full of what feels like honest soul-searching; and there's a glimpse, at a schoolfriend's birthday party, of life at a level of authority not yet aspired to by Magda, with the pomposity and the sham cordiality and the expensive imported fruit (if only a banana) on the table.

British film-making kept up its now established momentum, with prizes for *Another Country* (the French remaining fascinated by what they see as our never-ending obsession with Burgess and Maclean) and for Helen Mirren in *Cal*. The other British film in competition, Jerzy Skolimowski's *Success Is the Best Revenge*, manages to be as up to the minute as *Moonlighting*, even including a reference to the miners' strike, but lacks the earlier film's reverberations. In *Moonlighting*, there was a central point of focus, the building job on which the four Poles were engaged, and wherever Skolimowski ranged in his painful fantasies or farcical pirouettes, he came back to the planing and the plumbing. *Success Is the Best Revenge* could have been constructed to find a similar anchorage, in the work on an odd sort of theatrical happening that director Alex Rodak (Michael York, a less persuasive Pole than Jeremy Irons), is staging in London. But Skolimowski leaves the detail vague, not to say implausible, and although the film fizzles with energy, jokes, despair, football matches, frustrated family affections, politics and theatre, against a soundtrack that makes one think Skolimowski regards London as the world's noisiest city, it may be because it lacks that sense of a centre that it also lacks *Moonlighting's* almost magical ability to record its moment.

In the Quinzaine, Britain mastered Chris Petit's *Flight to Berlin* (flying also under German colours), the Merchant-Ivory *The Bostonians* and Stephen Frears' *The Hit*. *The Bostonians*, given a slightly rough ride by an audience who would have preferred Henry James in the 1880s to have anticipated the sensitivities of the 1980s, is as accomplished and good-looking as was to be expected, though Ruth Jhabvala's adaptation of James' sweeping social canvas does tend to miniaturise. If the film had been in competition, one would have been tempted to give any prize going to Linda Hunt, for her definitive, diminutive Dr Prance, the spunky voice of reason, although the newcomer Madeleine Potter does more than well as Verena Tarrant, the prize in the tug-of-war between Southern gentleman and Boston lady.

A Sunday in the Country.



Stephen Frears remains one of the perennial white hopes of British films, and it's disappointing that neither *Saigon—Year of the Cat* nor *The Hit* has quite pulled it off. *The Hit* has to do with a professional criminal (Terence Stamp) who grasses on the rest of his gang, spends years in relaxed Spanish exile acquiring a philosophical attitude to the vengeance that must catch up with him, and then has to face the reality—a drive across Spain with two hit men. The tone of Peter Prince's script is black, cold, quirkish, comic, but very hit or miss, and Stephen Frears fails to take up the slack. Top marks, however, to John Hurt, for an executioner whose demeanour strikingly resembles that of Lester Piggott after defeat on an odds-on favourite.

Argie can hardly be claimed for Britain, though it was shot in a strange London where you disembark from the tube at Tufnell Park and emerge at ground level in Piccadilly. This odd item, directed and written by Jorge Blanco, who also plays the lead, is about an Argentinian in London during the Falklands War who takes up for the duration with a girl who does a strip turn in a pub. The film is a bit of a mess and was evidently shot on a pathetically restricted budget (TV news of the war, often overheard, is given a strange retrospective cast by being taken from the later compilation film). One keeps watching, however, because of something basically sympathetic about the enterprise, not least its view of the Argentinian as a hopeless loser.

Finally, an assorted trio from France. The *Napoleon* industry is still steaming ahead, and Nelly Kaplan's *Abel Gance et son Napoléon* makes a valuable addition: fascinating extracts from Gance's diary, and rare and remarkable footage of the shooting. In *Paris vu par... 20 Ans Après* six directors have had the idea of updating the old Nouvelle Vague sketch film. The new film slides between the pretentious and the moderately interesting, but contains twelve minutes which are so taking that if the whole film fails to cross the Channel this snippet should certainly do so: Chantal Akerman's sketch, impudent, precise and funny, about two hungry girls on the loose in the city.

Flagging energies were wonderfully restored by Jacques Rivette's *L'Amour par Terre*, an unheralded market screening of a film which would have seen off many of those in the Palais. It tackles Rivette's old themes of invention and make-believe and hazy realities, is set in a country house decorated like a series of flamboyant stage sets and played with verve by a cast which includes—in, as it were, the Céline and Julie roles—the unlikely but inspired team of Geraldine Chaplin and Jane Birkin. *L'Amour par Terre* is sophisticated, amusing, thought-provoking and shot with a camera that glides, stabs and watches, no movements wasted, as Rivette works out his off-beat private theatricals. Other festivals should grab a film that Cannes, with its continually perplexing selection procedures, chose to ignore. □

and Richard Roud

Not since the Thalberg days at MGM has literature exercised such a strong attraction for film-makers as it did at this year's Cannes Festival. And not the 'standards' beloved by Thalberg, although, thanks to Gérard Depardieu, Molière's *Tartuffe* put in an appearance. It was mostly modern classics: Malcolm Lowry, Luigi Pirandello, Rabindranath Tagore. As so often happens, the greater the book, the worse the film. Leone's *Once Upon a Time in America*, based on *The Hoods*, a book by David Aaronson (pen-name Harry Grey), turned out to be a much more successful film than Huston's version of *Under the Volcano*. Thus corroborating Andrew Sarris' dictum: more great films have been made from the novels of W. R. Burnett than from those of Dostoevsky.

Of course, not everything fits this paradigm: the best film in the Quinzaine, Nelson Pereira dos Santos' *Memories of Prison*, is based, as was his earlier ground-breaking *Vidas Secas*, on a book by Graciliano Ramos, said to be the greatest writer Brazil has ever produced. Set in the 1930s, the film concerns a 'subversive' writer who is first thrown into gaol and then sent to a penal colony. These prisons are a metaphor for Brazilian society as a whole; and the director would probably see it as no less relevant to the Brazil of today than to half a century ago. As in many stories of intellectuals sent to prison, our hero gains greater knowledge of his country and himself from this enforced association with a mixture of political and social outlaws. Equally striking, though, is the way his wife is transformed by the experience of being left to cope alone. At the beginning, we see her as a neurotically jealous woman with little sense of initiative; her husband's imprisonment,

however, brings out latent virtues and she shows herself to be resourceful, efficient and devoted to freeing him. And he does get out, presumably, although this is never stated, through her interventions. With the help of the motley crew of fellow prisoners who want their story told, he also smuggles out the manuscript he has written in prison. Never has the prestige of the writer, the man who can put it all down, been clearer.

It would seem that the book on which *Once Upon a Time in America* is based is no literary masterpiece; rather, it provided Sergio Leone with a plot-line on which he has hung his own 'Proust' film, covering fifty years in the lives of four Jewish-American boys who become bootleggers, then gangsters, and in one case a corrupt US government official. As with most Italian films, credit is given to six scriptwriters, and who knows who did what? But from internal evidence (the similarities between this film and Bertolucci's *1900*), it would seem that the late Franco (Kim) Arcalli, who co-scripted and edited *1900*, brought a good deal to the film, particularly in the equivocal love-hate relationship between the characters played by Robert De Niro and James Woods.

The version shown at Cannes runs 220 minutes; and this apparently represents Leone's idea of a compromise, for a much longer version exists which will eventually be seen on television. In Britain and America, however, we may only see the distributor's cut, shorter by an hour. An attempt was also made to 'straighten out' the chronology of the film. But Leone's construction, which jumps around in time and puts flashbacks into flashbacks, was apparently so well managed that this effort to 'improve' the

Michael York in *Success Is the Best Revenge*.



film just would not work—like the attempt to straighten out Ophuls' *Lola Montès*. The real Leone fans were somewhat disappointed by the absence of precisely those elements which have always kept me from really esteeming Leone: his frozen aestheticism and portentous 'artistry'.

The films inspired by the greater works of literature were disappointing. First, *Tartuffe*: a *mise en scène* by Gérard Depardieu (who also plays Tartuffe) from the stage *mise en scène* of Jacques Lassalle. No attempt is made to hide the fact that this is a film of a stage production, and for me it just didn't work. For one thing, Depardieu can play almost any role except that of an ascetic hypocrite; for another, the original stage production didn't seem remarkable enough to be worth preserving. Depardieu might have done better if he had started from scratch.

Satyajit Ray has long wanted to make a film of Tagore's novel *Home and the World*. Like Tagore's *Charulata*, this is also a triangle story: wife, husband and husband's best friend. It is an overtly political novel, set in 1908, the best friend being an agitator who wants to free Indians from dependence on foreign (British) goods, and also protest against the division of Bengal into two parts and the fomenting of dissidence between Hindus and Moslems. The novel is told from three points of view, and indeed almost every chapter is divided into three: Bimala's story, Nikhil's story and Sandip's story. Rightly or wrongly, there has been no attempt in the film to preserve this triple first-person viewpoint; but Ray's son Sandip, who completed the film after his father suffered two heart attacks, maintains that it has four viewpoints: those of the wife, the husband, the friend and the director. It is a film which leans heavily on dialogue, but the real problem for me was the casting of Bimala. A stage actress whom Ray discovered playing in—of all things—Brecht's *Galileo*, Swatilekha Chatterji just does not have that radiance we expect from his heroines, a radiance that has so often lit up the screen with the gentlest of smiles.

Marco Bellocchio's career has been more than uneven over the last decade or so; it's been downright disappointing. And his version of Pirandello's *Henry IV* is not a success. Marcello Mastroianni is not the right actor to play a man who, having lost his reason, believes himself to be the character he was playing in a youthful masquerade: the Emperor who went barefoot to Canossa to ask forgiveness of the Pope. Nor does Claudia Cardinale seem the ideal casting for Mathilde. Oddly enough, this is a film which for once is too *short*, just ninety minutes, although too much of that time is taken up with pointless flashbacks of scenes which are quite adequately described in the dialogue. Odder still is the muffed ending: in the play, we learn that our hero has only been pretending to be mad in order to escape the world, though when he sees his chance to kill his rival he is forced to go back to feigning



Nastassia Kinski in *Paris, Texas*.

insanity to escape imprisonment. This important element is lost in Bellocchio's film: it just sort of stops. Even the old Hollywood *As You Desire Me* (which happened to be on French television during the festival) had more of a Pirandellian flavour.

The most flagrant gap between literary intention and filmic creation came with John Huston's *Under the Volcano*. This is a novel that Buñuel, Losey and countless others have wanted to film. I can't think why. As Joyce said about *Ulysses*, the hero of the novel is language. And Huston has declared that what he wanted to do in his film was to get 'rid of all the literature'. But the plot is uninteresting in and of itself—who cares about the last day in the life of an alcoholic, which is about all we are left with in the film? There are only four main characters in the book, and on the pretext that Jacques Laruelle, the French former film-maker, is 'just' the narrator, Huston has removed him. But of course he is not 'just' the narrator—it's like taking the 'I' out of Proust—and in any case Laruelle does have an important role as the other man, besides Hugh, the man brought up as the consul's brother, who is in love with the consul's wife. How someone as intelligent as Huston could think he could make a film of what is almost *too* literary a book by getting rid of the literature is beyond me. Added to which, almost as if to forestall some distributor from rearranging the film, he himself has destroyed the flashback structure and narrated it in chronological order, though whatever story the novel has is essentially in the *way* it is told. Out of respect, I suppose, Huston received a special prize for the body of his work.

For me, as for many others, the best film in competition was Wim Wenders' *Paris, Texas*. I have greatly admired Wenders' work, although both *Hammett*

and *The State of Things* made me fear that somehow he had become a burnt-out case—or at least that he ought to give up trying to make films in America. But with the help of Sam Shepard, co-writer of the screenplay, he has here turned out his best film, one which allies the tenderness of *Alice in the Cities* with the formal qualities of *The American Friend*. The screenplay is an original, yet it seems to have been nourished by Shepard's *Motel Chronicles*, and perhaps that is the best way that good writing can work in the cinema. But again, one never knows who really contributed what: L. M. Kit Carson is credited with story adaptation, adding a third voice.

This is a German-French co-production, shot in America with Wenders' favourite cameraman (Robby Muller) and editor (Peter Przygodda). The choice and direction of actors is superb: Harry Dean Stanton plays his first starring role as Travis, a man who is left by his wife Jane (Nastassia Kinski) and who thereupon dumps his son on his brother (Dean Stockwell) and sister-in-law (Aurore Clément) and wanders off into the middle distance for four years. The subject of the film is not, as one might think, the reunion of Travis and Jane, but rather Jane's reunion with her son (Hunter Carson, the son of Kit Carson and Karen Black). This is a Road Movie film (the name of Wenders' production company), but it is much more than that; and the final half-hour, which it would be criminal to describe, had me as close to tears as I can ever get. (They were, too, the kind of tears one doesn't feel ashamed of afterwards.) The film was described by Wenders as his way 'of saying goodbye to America'. If this is indeed so, it is the greatest bread and butter letter ever written. And it was particularly satisfying that, for once, the best film in competition actually won the Palme d'Or. ■

Home Fires Burning

John Brown

If it hadn't been for Johnny Carson, it would probably never have occurred to me to think about *The Dresser* (written by Ronald Harwood and directed by Peter Yates) in relation to *Rainy Day Women* (written by David Pirie, directed by Ben Bolt and transmitted in the *Play for Today* series in April). But as it happened, *Rainy Day Women* was followed on BBC1 that evening by the recording of the Academy Awards show, which was hosted by Carson. At the beginning of the show, anticipating a repeat of the previous two years' results which didn't in fact transpire, he delivered some mock-apprehensive remarks about the current high profile of British cinema and chose an interesting metaphor for that putative success—'the biggest invasion since the Falklands' was his way of referring to the various acting, writing and directing nominations for *Educating Rita* and *The Dresser*.

As it also happened, I had seen both Lewis Gilbert's film and Peter Yates' within the space of a few days the previous week. They were depressing experiences, particularly *Educating Rita* whose dismal performances and production values, together with its snobbish plain man's reverence for 'Art' and 'Culture', made it little more than a regression to 1950s Pinewood, starring Caine as Kenneth More and Walters as Lana Morris. But *The Dresser* seemed, at least in passing, a more interesting and ambitious failure, and Carson's bad joke had the ironically chance virtue of crystallising, with sudden clarity, the links between Yates' film and *Rainy Day Women*: the use which both movies make of their Second World War setting, the nature of their self-conscious 'Britishness' and their relationship to quite different (indeed, opposing) conceptions of British cinema. It's these links and their implications for current film-making in this country that I want to explore.

Not much critical attention—of the serious variety, at least—has been paid to *The Dresser*, either as a play or as a film. I suspect that this is largely because its apparent substance is very much

there in the foreground and thus easily accessible: the tragi-comic interplay of two larger-than-life characters (Sir, the elderly, bombastic actor-manager with his failing physical and mental health, and Norman, his ultra-camp chatterbox of a devoted dresser) and the familiar, always fascinating meta-drama of putting on a show, in this case Shakespeare. As such, it functions primarily as an exercise in theatrical nostalgia (aided by the knowledge that Harwood was once dresser to Sir Donald Wolfit) which appeals to and firmly reinforces populist ideas about actors and acting, the Bohemian life and the backstage feuds, the smell of the greasepaint and so on. Yates and Harwood allow free passage to these elements in the transposition from stage to screen, especially in the performances of Tom Courtenay and Albert Finney in the leading roles, and maintain their dominance. But they have also devised a wider context for them than the single dressing-room set of the original

play, and as a result, the film becomes something more than simply a celebration of old-fashioned theatre in its own terms.

The Shakespeare play whose performance regulates as it were the main action of *The Dresser* is *King Lear*, and the film flirts with some half-developed parallels between the play and the 'real life' drama behind the scenes. Like Lear himself, Sir rules his company of strolling players tyrannically and capriciously; Madge the company's stage-manager (Eileen Atkins) functions as a kind of Cordelia, harsh in her dealings with the old man but secretly in love with him for many years; and Norman serves as the off-stage Fool, the only one who can with impunity harangue, insult and cajole his master into getting on with the job of acting. But these are only hints, and what seems more significant about the choice of Shakespearean play is that Lear is king of Britain, presented as a kingdom suffering internal strife while also under threat from abroad.

This use of *Lear* as a subtext is supported by the film's casual insistence upon the details of the wartime setting. The first shot is a slow pan across Sir's dressing-table, discovering a carefully arranged selection of objects beginning with a tray of make-up and ending on a ration book. Soon afterwards, the film's two major exterior sequences (in a railway station and an open-air market) lay discreet stress on the iconography of the home front—soldiers on leave, posters, shortages of foodstuffs—while the performance of *Lear* is preceded by an air-raid warning which forces a terrified Norman on to the stage to address the audience, his fear and trembling due not to the possibility of being bombed but of appearing in front of the curtain. He has to carry out this unaccustomed role because the company is short of actors, thanks to the war—which seems to be

The Dresser: On set, Peter Yates, Ronald Harwood and Albert Finney.



Sir's main complaint against Hitler.

When these elements are taken into account, underpinning the theatrical nostalgia, *The Dresser* can be read as an allegory, albeit a hesitant and partial one, about Britain in political transition. The old quasi-aristocratic and autocratic values represented by Sir (his absolute rule over the company, his fixed ideas of art and culture in society, from the centrality of Shakespearian tragedy to the minutiae of stage-craft, his elitist self-belief which enables him to stop the train with one charismatic bellow) are already becoming anachronistic; a new kind of theatre and society is, by implication, gaining power and the end of the war will mark its putative ascendancy. But while the war continues, the old order can still be celebrated—and can have its finest hour.

This, I think, is the point of *The Dresser*'s most memorable scene, and the only one in which the film suddenly springs alive: the scene where Norman and some of the other actors go into a Dionysiac frenzy in the wings as they operate the sound effects machinery for Shakespeare's storm. As Sir howls out into the auditorium and as Norman and the rest redouble their efforts, Oxenby (Edward Fox) watches sardonically. Earlier, he has refused to help with the sound effects and is apparently the only one to risk quarrelling openly with Sir; there is a reference to a play he has written which Sir has no intention of reading, let alone putting on, and the character may be a representative of the new theatre (the young John Osborne?). But suddenly Oxenby steps forward and joins in with the group to bring the storm to the required level. The old order has briefly triumphed, even though Sir stamps off, as dissatisfied as ever with the efforts of lesser mortals.

To the extent that it does function as a conservative allegory, *The Dresser* is a very fragile and romantic one, practically a lament for the cultural equivalent of feudalism and Merrie England, and it is difficult to know how much weight Yates and Harwood intend us to place upon the elements in the film which I have been discussing. By contrast, it is clear from *Rainy Day Women* that David Pirie and Ben Bolt know exactly what they are doing in their very different representation of Britain at war.

After a brief prologue set in 1984, the main action takes place in the summer of 1940, in an England braced none too well to meet the imminent threat of invasion. John Truman (Charles Dance), an army captain who has been traumatised by the experience of Dunkirk, arrives in an isolated Fenland village, ostensibly on his way to rejoin his regiment. In fact he has been sent there by Reed (Cyril Cusack), a drab official in the Ministry of Information, on a covert mission to assess local civilian morale in the light of a childish anonymous letter alleging the presence of German spies. Truman soon ascertains that the letter is from a small boy, Tom Durkow, who is haunted by adventure-comic fantasies of the



Rainy Day Women: Ibbetson (Ian Hogg) 'relishing his status as a Home Guard'.

Germans tunnelling underground from the Channel Islands. But as Truman also discovers, there is a more pernicious adult hysteria at work, centred on Alice, Tom's mother, and the trio of land-girls billeted with her. Alice Durkow (Suzanne Bertish) is English but her husband was a refugee German communist who died after being interned, and the village men, led by Dennis Ibbetson (Ian Hogg), regard her as evil, not only for her association with the enemy race but also for her proto-feminist attitudes and for the matriarchal household she has established with the land-girls.

The potential for thematic overkill in such an enriched plot is obviously considerable, but what is primarily striking about *Rainy Day Women*'s opening sequences is the sheer economy and precision with which Pirie's screenplay and Bolt's direction handle the complex exposition, integrating character, plot and theme into a chain of concise incidents. Two early scenes, for example, establish in the space of a couple of minutes the precariousness of Truman's grip on himself, the authoritarian truculence of Ibbetson, relishing his status as a Home Guard, the foreignness of the Fenland landscape and the atmosphere of creeping paranoia—with the latter two elements combining to produce the suggestion of a possible 'alternative universe' scenario of the war (as in, for instance, Len Deighton's novel *SS-GB*), an idea hinted at elsewhere in the announcement of a German invasion which triggers off the Walpurgisnacht climax.

Pirie and Bolt proceed to weave these multiple narrative strands into an extraordinarily charged and coherent vision of the dark underside of a particular conception of England and Englishness. The gradual unleashing of the village men's aggression, legitimised by the distant war in which by reason of age and exempted work they cannot fight, is partly directed against Truman, the

decent but ineffectual member of the bourgeoisie who cannot bring himself to understand what is happening until it's too late. But the real target (in the sense that hostility to the Germans has merely been temporarily displaced from a different, far more ancient war) is Alice and the threat to the patriarchal order which she embodies.

At one point Alice talks to an embarrassed Truman about the myth of Leda and the Swan, and about the power and knowledge which men have believed they derive from the violation of women. Hutton the village inn-keeper has already confessed his impotence to the woman doctor, Karen (Lindsay Duncan) in her surgery, squirming with nervous shame, and trembles as he caresses Truman's uniform on a hanger in a later scene; Ibbetson slyly demonstrates to one of the land-girls exactly how to milk a cow; and both men watch lasciviously as another of the girls, who they know is menstruating, is forced to climb a ladder in front of them to stack bales of hay. Later, acting on what turns out to be ludicrously false information, Ibbetson and the Home Guard platoon brutally ransack Alice's house while Truman stands impotently by; then the conjunction of blood and sex is horribly resumed when Hutton dresses in Truman's uniform and forces his way into Alice's house a second time—his shotgun goes off accidentally in the struggle with the women, castrating him, and the wound is so severe that Alice has to put him out of his misery. At the beginning Karen tends to Truman's cut wrist while he watches her, obviously attracted to her, although the relationship never goes further than a later coded conversation; at the end, while Ibbetson and his men are killing all the women (including Karen) and Tom in putative revenge for Hutton's death, Truman is beaten up for trying to steal a jeep from the army base where he has vainly gone for help, and is thrown into a cell by the military police. As he stares

around the cell in desperation a single trickle of blood runs from his mouth.

But the final turn of the screw is yet to come. Reed, summoned from London, takes Truman to the remains of Alice's house, which has apparently been bombed. Challenged by Truman, Reed admits that his men blew up the house to obliterate traces of the women's deaths; he has 'other employers' besides the Ministry of Information. The killing of Alice, Karen and the others ('It was a slaughterhouse,' Reed says quietly; mercifully it occurs off-screen) was not what was actually intended, but the objective of Truman's mission, hidden from him, has been achieved all the same: the removal of potential disruption to civilian morale from those who do not conform. As Reed tells Truman to forget what has happened ('It's Chinatown, Jake'), Pirie and Bolt cut from Truman's devastated face to the epilogue, a funeral reception in 1984. In the prologue a small boy discovers Truman's diary of 1940; now we learn that this is Truman's great-grandson, and as the reception continues (the funeral has been Truman's) we hear fragments of conversation. 'At least he lived to see the Falklands,' a voice is heard saying with satisfaction. The war, not the nominations for *Educating Rita* and *The Dresser*.

The condition of England portrayed in *Rainy Day Women*, in sharp contrast to that of *The Dresser*, is a profoundly bleak and subversive one. The common values represented to varying degrees by Alice, Karen and Truman are in effect attacked and destroyed both from above and below—by the ruling class in the shape of Reed and his employers and by the under-class represented by Ibbetson and his men. Truman protests to Reed as they stand by the remains of Alice's house that the truth must be made known; but the last page of his diary reveals that he eventually accepted the situation. There is, however, a curious paradox underlying these two opposed representations of Britain at war, and it has as much to do, I think, with the different traditions and conventions within which the two films are constructed as with their respective makers' different views and intentions.

For all its elaborately promoted status (the Royal film, the Oscar nominations) as a big-screen movie, for example, there is something anomalous about *The Dresser* in the context of British cinema. It doesn't connect, either conceptually or thematically, with the various strands in contemporary film-making in Britain, nor does it seem to relate to very much in the long gap between the end of the early 1960s revival and *Chariots of Fire*; indeed, the last major British film I can think of to have used theatre and acting as central metaphors for society is Tony Richardson's version of John Osborne's *The Entertainer* nearly twenty-five years ago. (Incidentally, the casting of Courtenay and Finney, two of the actors most associated with that era of British cinema, creates another level of allegorical resonance, even though the choice



The Dresser: Norman (Tom Courtenay).

was probably not made with that in mind.) But there is something comfortable and familiar about *The Dresser* all the same which prevents it from being readily seen as the oddity it is in terms of cinema, and that something is television drama.

Television drama, that is, of a particular kind—the long-running series/serials such as *A Family at War*, *The Spoils of War*, *Forgive Us Our Foolish Ways*, *Tenko*, *We'll Meet Again* (inspired by John Schlesinger's *Yanks*, the one recent British film which does relate to *The Dresser*) and, in a hybrid genre, *Dad's Army*. These series have a great deal in common thematically with Yates and Harwood's film; they are all centred on the experience of the civilian population on a day-to-day basis, with the war off-stage as it were; they exploit with considerable subtlety a reservoir of wry nostalgia even for the tensions, hardships and losses of the time; and they appeal, again with considerable skill, to what seems to be a very contemporary mood in the older television audience, namely the half-articulated conviction that the war created a sense and strength of common purpose that has now vanished. In those years Britain held centre stage, now it is scarcely present in the wings; therefore those years were better. Precisely the attitude, in other words, that *Rainy Day Women* sets out to attack.

Nor is this the only way in which *The Dresser* operates as a big-screen extension of television traditions. The very conception of its central characters and the relationship between them conforms closely to a dominant convention in situation comedy series, which could be described as the Don Quixote and Sancho Panza Show. Sir and Norman are yet another odd couple, the latest variant on the archetype which is common to *Steptoe and Son*, *The Likely Lads* Terry and Bob, *Minder's* Arthur Daley and Terry McCann, *Yes Minister's* Jim Hacker

and Sir Humphrey, *The Good Life* (the couple doubled), *Dad's Army* again—Captain Mainwaring and Sergeant Wilson—and many others: the dreamer versus the realist, the schemer versus the fixer, the master versus the servant, the idealist versus the cynic, the self-aggrandiser versus the self-deprecator.

Hence the paradox to which I referred earlier. While the cinema film *The Dresser* crossbreeds different traditions from television drama, the television drama production *Rainy Day Women* draws its narrative strength from some of the most critically disparaged traditions of British commercial cinema. The final revelations of the plot may recall the 'secret war' theme of David Hare's *Licking Hitler* and Ian McEwan and Richard Eyre's *The Imitation Game* as much as they echo the 1970s pattern of the private eye genre in *Chinatown* and *Night Moves*. But the central story itself stands at a major intersection of the rural Gothic conventions in British cinema, from *Straw Dogs* (paid graceful homage when the village men take Truman shooting) via the invasion fantasies of *Went the Day Well?* and *Quatermass Two* to Hammer horror films and thrillers. As a critic, Pirie has written in persuasive defence (in *A Heritage of Horror*) of this strand in English—rather than British—cinema; not the least achievement of *Rainy Day Women* is that it puts theory into practice, reasserting and revivifying the kind of cinema which is especially without honour in its own country.

'The debate will continue,' wrote Penelope Houston (threateningly? wearily?) in the Spring 1984 issue of *SIGHT AND SOUND*, discussing the current conflict/alliance relationship between cinema and television in Britain. Whether or not this article is a useful contribution to that debate, I'm not sure. It certainly seems important to shift it away from questions of industrial practices in production, distribution and exhibition and issues of artistic freedom or constraint towards an overall account of our moving-picture conventions and traditions across the board of the big and small screens—which is what I've been attempting to do here in a limited way. For if *The Dresser* remains, for all its representative thematic interest, a dull and stiff piece of film-making, perhaps that has less to do with matters of individual talent than with the vocabulary, as it were, to which the speakers are unwittingly restricted. The result is something locally specific but pronounced clearly and slowly for foreigners: very much a *British* film, a compromise film in the same sense that 'Britain' itself is a compromise, a construction rather than a culture. While a film such as *Rainy Day Women*, highly conscious of its choice of vocabulary, operating within unfashionable dialects in the face of a dubious art-house accent from draughtsman to ploughman, putting its energy into story-telling and discovering its themes in the process, succeeds as an uncompromised film: an *English* movie, and a magnificent one at that. ■

Terror tale

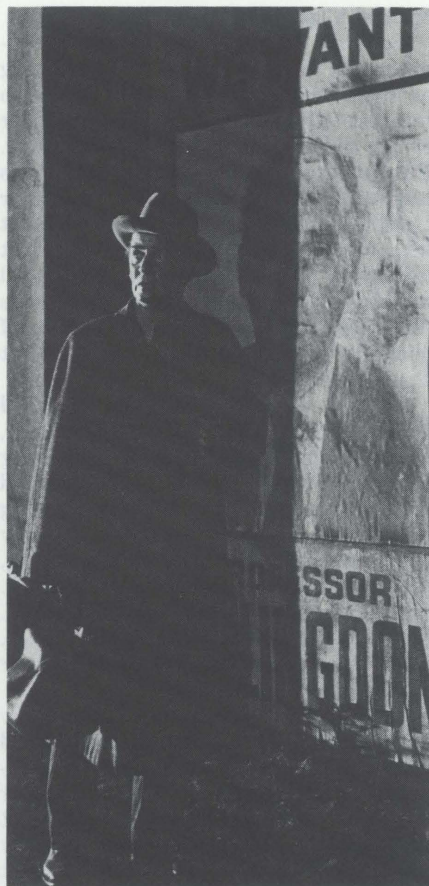
Sob stories about creative people trying to sell the idea of a movie to financiers, producers and the like are legion. Almost every other good and/or successful film has some hair-raising tale of initial refusals to tell. There are also a plethora of stories about projects that were never made. This, thus far, is one of them, though the film in question still has considerable hope of being produced—despite the further difficulties created by the Chancellor's closure of the tax shelter loophole.

It is not the tale of an art movie refused on grounds that it won't sell, nor that of a likely popular success in which financial boneheads can't see potential. More interestingly, it stands between these two poles, like most other current projects chasing money, and was told to me by R. T. Witcombe, scriptwriter and film journalist, about his own *After Rimbaud*, a political thriller in which a terrorist group based in Paris threatens the city with a nuclear device—all our nightmares, in fact. And it is an instructive lesson in the sort of hurdles that have to be jumped in order to make a film nowadays, even with considerable interest shown in it at most stages.

The story begins on 31 October 1982, when Ramond Danon, of Eléphant Production, Paris, wrote on my behalf to the National Film Development Fund in London to say: "This letter is to inform the panel... that I would be prepared to commit up to 50 per cent of the production costs on this project, subject to (a) a satisfactory draft screenplay being delivered, and (b) a suitable co-producer in the UK being found."

Since I had already spent some months in England trying to establish just this sort of interest from British producers, Danon's approval of the project looked decisive. To boost my euphoria, Robert Powell and Susannah York read the detailed 50-page treatment that autumn and said yes, while in France Raoul Coutard, one of the world's leading lighting cameramen, was also enthusiastic and prepared either to shoot or to direct. Danon's fifty producer credits included films by Joseph Losey, Bertrand Tavernier, Marco Ferreri and Alain Jessua. And Coutard, apart from being Godard's long-standing cinematographer, has nine features to his credit as director.

The first setback came when the NFDF said that they could not consider my application for script funding unless I had a British director as well as the British co-producer Danon required. Even the British stars were not enough. My instinctive objection to this suggestion was related to the nature of the film. *After Rimbaud* is intended to be a political thriller in the Costa-Gavras style, chilly and fast-moving. It concerns a pan-



Nightmares, 1950: Mad scientist Barry Jones with A-bomb (*Seven Days to Noon*).

European terrorist cadre named Dopodomani (which in Italian means "the day after tomorrow"). The aim of the cadre is "global fragmentation" and it constructs two backyard A-bombs, naming them after Rimbaud, who wrote in the 1870s that "the time of the assassins is here".

After Rimbaud shows terrorists, police and innocents caught in the 48-hour run-up to the detonation of Rimbaud One and Two—one bomb in the desert and the other in the middle of a major European city. All the principal action is set in Paris, Europe's leading clearing-house for international terrorism. Who better then to realise this film about Paris in crisis than Coutard, who had shot both *Z* and *L'Aveu* for Costa-Gavras, and who had also assured me that he could bring it in for under £1 million—the right amount for Danon's budget?

So I thanked the NFDF and went looking for a British co-producer who could not only obtain co-finance but might also underwrite my modest requirements for writing the script. Enough, at any rate, to buy me three months uninterrupted time. But small sums for script development aren't so easy to find. It's almost an axiom of film financing that it's harder to raise five thousand pounds to write a script than five million to capitalise "the product".

In the winter of 82-83 this hard fact was brought home to me, as producer after producer praised the treatment,

studied the package I'd put together, but then backed off. Could the fundamental problem be the subject matter? The general position of the British producers I encountered seemed to be summed up by Clive Parsons, who made *Gregory's Girl*. He wrote: "Terrorists are difficult screen subjects and indeed have been featured in some pretty dreary films. They lack the epic quality of Martin Luther King or Gandhi, who achieved much more by very different means." Undeniable, perhaps, but what about my quite different political thriller? Was its theme, as Jette Bonnevie at Rediffusion suggested, "Too close to the daily news" and neither epic nor escapist enough?

It's not my intention to turn my story into a tale of sour grapes. In fact, the British producers I met in my travels between Soho and NW3 were courteous, alert and accessible—and most of them no doubt knew their trade. In the present climate, though, they didn't appear to want even part-financial responsibility for the sort of film that might disturb. Perhaps my fictional Dopodomani was too much for them—someone who said that we were all in the war right now, living out the truth of the dictum that there is no such thing as the innocent bystander.

In the winter of 1983 I nursed my wounds, then did a madcap swerve and wrote a novel. The money might not be available for the writing of the script but all the same I was working towards a mood in which I could write it anyhow. In spring I got started, in an attic flat just off the Rue de Seine, where Baudelaire had also sweated, and in the cafés off the Boulevard Mich, in balmy sunshine. To be smelling the vanilla in the streets and seeing the crocuses in bud while bringing to life modern assassins was an eerie experience. But in this city it seemed somehow appropriate, at a time when Captain Paul Barris, ex-anti-terrorist officer, was discovered to have been in contact with terrorist organisations with the full knowledge of the Elysée—the sort of twist my screenplay postulated.

On 21 April, almost six months after receiving Danon's commitment to *After Rimbaud*, the screenplay was finished. Danon wrote: "I would hereby like to state that I have read your screenplay and am willing to provide up to 50 per cent of the finance, and French distribution guarantees, provided the budget does not exceed one and a half million sterling." Coutard also liked the script and was still happy either to shoot the movie or to direct it. And the British stars were also more certain. Susannah York was cast to play the semi-innocent heroine, an academic who becomes victim and martyr to Dopodomani. Robert Powell, whom I had asked to go against his usual grain, would play the terrorist leader, and was understandably a little nervous. He had to make flesh and blood of a man who believed in global destruction and nonchalantly

recited the poems of Rimbaud—"Make the cities eat dust. Oxidise the gargoyles. Fill the boudoirs with the powder of burning rubies." In sedate new Robert cut another slice of sponge cake and agreed it was a challenge. But, yes, he liked the script, and he'd play the villain.

Through the summer of that year, while in search again for a British producer, I drew up a preliminary budget with the help of Christopher Sutton of Twin-Continental Films. We arrived at below-the-line costs of £995,000. The film would be shot in 42 days, using a French crew and English technicians for post-production in London. That way we would fulfil the terms of the Department of Trade's Anglo-French co-production agreements. Also during the early summer Frixos Constantin of Poseidon Films appeared to want to get behind the project. "I intend to provide the British finance for this co-production if possible," he wrote, while immediately preoccupied with the post-production of his Russian-financed movie about Pavlova, directed by Michael Powell.

It was Constantin who approached James Ferman, the British film censor, to get his reaction to the "politically tricky" script. "Why did he write such a good script about such a terrible subject?" Ferman was said to have asked. He thought the project was certainly risky but agreed to reserve his final judgment until he saw the film.

This reaction was a deterrent for some of the producers I talked to, though the American censor also saw the script, via Paramount executives in New York, and was more sanguine. Paramount, however, wasn't. "Of considerable merit but not for us," commented John E. Goldhammer. And with the fading of American interest, Poseidon Films went by the board. "Produce it yourself," advised Constantin, not unkindly. That

seemed a tall order for a writer.

Several other British would-be co-producers later, I decided to get moving on the French translation, intending to interest either another French producer or one in Switzerland or West Germany. But at this juncture, cheering words arrived from Barry Hanson, the former Goldcrest producer turned independent who admired my "enormous efforts at initiating an alternative financial matrix" and thought the narrative was "splendidly articulated" but was himself "heavily overcommitted already right through 1984."

So on, with his blessing, to Fred Turner, of Rank Film Distributors, whose script editor, Liz Davison, having discovered that Danon only expected distribution rights for French-speaking and West German territories, rapidly read and liked the script. She, however, disliked my own attempts at casting. "Get young American stars," she urged. "Then we'll see what we can do." That, after two years of legwork, rather shattered the perspective.

Should I call it a day and let my brainchild die? The difficulty was that I'd by now discovered that hypothetical filmmaking was addictive—just the thing for urban romantics, and the walking kept me fit. So I went on with it, encouraged by a phone call from John Goldstone, just back from California, who said he was too busy filming in America but recommended Jeremy Thomas. His latest film, *The Hit*, had been made with funds from Central Television and in this area, Goldstone opined, more projects could just possibly be needed.

I'd become a bit of a connoisseur of producers' offices. I'd been in the baronial and the seedy. I'd been offered cigars, Gauloises and red tape. I'd been in skyscrapers, drawing-rooms and warehouses. I was literally on my hands and

knees by the time I'd climbed the four flights of narrow stairs to Thomas' office in Greek Street. Yet once inside, I was comforted. It was quite Parisian, seeming to exist to serve a need—the production of exciting films. Mr Thomas wasn't about to serve a power-decor on you. Could this be, at last, my safe-house? But he was out to lunch, though the script was "expected". Well, as Coutard once said: "Alors, Richard, if not this one, maybe the next."

All the same, in the aftermath of *The Day After* (surely a dreadful film), the old passion is not quite repressed. The main complaint from viewers, according to the *Guardian's* report, was that the film had been American not British. Somehow or other, there seemed some hope for me yet...

Perils

It's now an official fact, believe it or not. Ninety-seven per cent of the national audience for films sees them on either television or video. All the more reason, then, for films to be put into cinemas intelligently. It was not intelligent, for instance, to open Richard Eyre's *Loose Connections* in London during the same week as Hugh Hudson's *Greystoke*, Mike Nichols' *Silkwood* and the 1983 Cannes prize-winner, *The Ballad of Narayama*. The result was poor press coverage, immediately translated into disappointing box-office figures.

But if that wasn't the best way to handle *Loose Connections*, it was a disastrous method of opening Imamura's film, since it was added to an already heavy list of press shows so much at the last moment that some critics did not even write about it. There was no pre-publicity whatsoever for what was hopefully thought to be one of the blue riband art movies of the year. The culprits, in this case, were Cannon, who admittedly did the deed in desperation when John Cassavetes' Berlin winner, *Love Streams*, had failed to live up to any sort of expectations at the box-office of their new Shaftesbury Avenue art-house, the Premiere (briefly the Classic but to this day still known by taxi-drivers as the Columbia).

It was, perhaps, understandable that Cannon opened the Premiere with *Love Streams*, their own film suddenly elevated by its last day Berlin outing into something more formidable than the company must have imagined. Though anybody could have told them that Cassavetes' films are problematical nowadays, and indeed have been for some time. Neither *Gloria* nor *Opening Night* nor *The Killing of a Chinese Bookie* did especially well in Britain, and his last success was *Woman Under the Influence* at the Curzon. In fact, *Love Streams* virtually emptied the cinema, which has some seven hundred seats, within three



Nightmares, 1977: Mad General Burt Lancaster plots a missile launch (*Twilight's Last Gleaming*).



The Ballad of Narayama: Ken Ogata and Sumiko Sakamoto.

weeks and a Yugoslavian comedy, which would almost certainly have done the same, was hastily summoned up to replace it. It was even given a press show until wiser counsels prevailed.

Finally, the Cassavetes was rudely pulled out following one of the brief flying visits Menahem Golan and Yoram Globus, heads of Cannon, now pay to the UK. The Imamura opening was the result, making the company's press agents tear out a few of their last remaining hairs. Fortunately, the film didn't do as badly as they expected in these conditions. But the fact remains that the Premiere's beginnings were hardly promising, raising fears that Golan and Globus didn't quite know what they were doing announcing a new London art-house with such conviction and a 700-seater one at that, competing with the nearby Lumiere, run with much more experience by Artificial Eye. Even that well-run outfit has had its troubles of late, though Schlöndorff's *Swann in Love* arrived to save the box-office embarrassments of *Flight to Berlin* and *Reflections* in the nick of time.

The question now being asked is—are there too many art-houses in London? Artificial Eye has three, Mainline four (with five screens) and Cinegate two (with three screens). Add the highly successful Curzon, the Academy and the Phoenix, to say nothing of the ICA, the Ritzy, the Rio and the Everyman, and you have rather too many for the comfort of a minority audience which may not be disappearing as fast as that for the commercial cinema but is getting increasingly choosy about what it wants to see. Greater choice of screens, it seems, does not mean bigger audiences. Just bigger headaches for those scouring the festivals for suitable product. And anyone like Cannon who plunges into this particular game without adequate preparation does not look likely to stay the course.

Ascanio

The first time I met Ascanio Branca, head of Fox's UK operations until his untimely death last March, I thought he was a bit dotty. He was pacing his office, shouting at himself. 'I knew it wasn't the right cinema. I've done it wrong again—destroyed a good film. When will I ever learn!'

This self-denigration, I later learnt, was born not so much of eccentricity, though he could behave very oddly at times and cheerfully admitted it, but rather a manifestation of the care he took to release his films in the best way possible. In fact, the particular film he was talking about would not have made any money wherever he had planned to put it. The public simply did not want to know, despite its excellence. Every time this happened, and it occurs quite a lot these days, Ascanio tended to blame himself. He was one of those rare movie moguls who cared very deeply about films. And equally about decent cinemas. He wanted the public to get its money's worth as well as Fox, and he strove mightily to make sure that they did. He was a most unusual man, and will be very sadly missed.

I particularly remember the first time he went up to the Edinburgh Festival, rather in state and asking for a hired car which the film festival people could ill afford. He was entertained to dinner with some trepidation but quickly summed up the situation, cancelled the car, refused to let the festival pay any of his bills and got down to helping it instead. Within a few hours he waxed immensely enthusiastic, telling all and sundry that they were doing a terrific job for the cinema and promising maximum co-operation in future years.

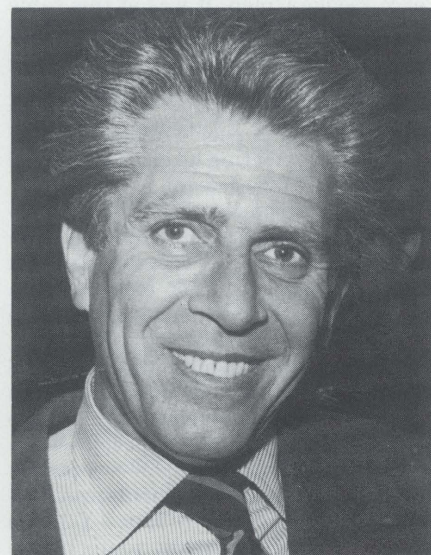
Henceforward, he was as good as his word, and he treated the London Festival with similar generosity. He also grew to love the National Film Theatre, which he went to regularly, as he did to most of the best-run cinemas in London. Only a few days before he died of a heart attack, he was at Romaine Hart's new Screens at Baker Street, full of enthusiasm and plans for the future. No other boss of a major American company in this country had quite the feeling he did about the territory he commanded, nor quite the determination to see wrong things put right. He became more British than the British while remaining absolutely the typical Italian in temperament.

What I most liked about Ascanio was the way he espoused British films, sometimes against the advice of his bosses in Hollywood. He did so very genuinely, and it was thus totally appropriate that David Puttnam, who owed him a lot over *Chariots of Fire* and *Local Hero*, spoke at his funeral service.

I remember him seeing me in the street once, as I was on my way to see a movie put out by Fox. 'Oh, don't bother with that,' he said. 'Look, there's a new British film that's much better just across the road. Let's both go and see it instead.' As a matter of fact, it was awful. But the point was that he was keen as mustard and it didn't matter that his company had nothing to do with it.

I can't think that we'll see his like again in a hurry, and that is a great pity. He died at the height of his powers and could have done a great deal more good. He insisted on standards, at a time when many others are letting them slip. He never gave up on a film and treated those he handled not as commodities to be sold as well as possible but almost as children to be nurtured individually with every care and attention. He was also an optimist in generally pessimistic times. Very much a memory to be built upon rather than sighed over. We ought to do something worthwhile in his name.

THE DIKLER



Ascanio Branca.

The recent death of these two unique international film figures seems to call for some supplement to the obituaries, an addendum which will try to set them against the perspective of their time.

It is clear that the contribution of neither man was restricted to his personal film-making, nor can their individual influence be abstracted from the historical events of their early years. Their formal education was coming to an end in the 1920s and what can be regarded as the first phase of their working lives coincided with the depression of the 30s and the first wide recognition of the film as an art form. Rotha's great work *The Film Till Now* was published in 1930 (when he was 23) and at a time when Thorold Dickinson was beginning to become increasingly involved in the film showing policies of the London Film Society. For their contemporaries therefore they represented the two principal sources of information on film, not only as a work of art but as an instrument of social analysis and indeed of social change. For many of us it was under the auspices of Paul and Thorold that the great Soviet films with their optimistic social realism paraded alongside the sombre German dramas of the alienated individual, each precisely composed image taking its place in a symphony for the eye.

It was perhaps inevitable that both men should ultimately become concerned with the employment of film for social purposes, often at the expense of their own personal film-making. This came earlier in the case of Rotha—partly because of his association with John Grierson in the early 30s and partly because Dickinson found his first work in features; but the growth of fascism and the consequent drift into war seems inevitably to have involved them in a social commitment which was in some measure to shape the rest of their lives. Thorold Dickinson allied himself with Republican Spain against Franco's fascist rebellion, while Paul Rotha, in the years immediately prior to the outbreak of war in 1939, was active for a time on behalf of a pacifist movement called the Peace Pledge Union. It was at this same time that Rotha became interested in working with younger men and women. He was of course himself around 30 and scarcely the elderly sage he sometimes appeared, even to people of his own age.

At our first meeting he cross-examined me rigorously over a drink as to whether I fully understood the whole rich significance of the prospect that John Grierson had opened before me with his offer of a job. Since this encounter took place on the very day that a temporary rift had obliged Paul himself to leave Grierson, I learned from it something never forgotten, about myself, about Grierson and most particularly about Paul. His relationships with older people—even when he became one himself—were only in rare and precious moments comfortable for them or for him. Yet his influence on the very many young people he sought to guide was often to last a life-



Paul Rotha (behind camera) during the filming of *World Without End*.

Edgar Anstey

Paul Rotha and Thorold Dickinson



Thorold Dickinson (seated) on the set of *Secret People*.

time. Even if with age came impatience and exasperated criticism, sometimes bitterness, there remained a tacit understanding that matters of great moment had been at issue. I remember that after one lunchtime reunion following a screening of films from my unit which he had viewed with fortitude, rather than enthusiasm, he suddenly and impetuously stopped and turned to me as we were crossing the road. He said, 'We all have been involved in great things . . . we must stay together.' And so through the difficult recent years many of us have stayed in touch, with never a maudlin moment, and no bitterness that could not be dissolved in a few glasses of whisky.

Rotha's skill as a teacher seemed to rest upon two inspiring qualities—his own superb technical assurance and his inability to compromise. Thorold Dickinson, who shared the documentary conviction which originated with Grierson—that to educate society with film must begin with the social education of the film-makers—came to his own role as a mentor latish in life, but as Professor in Film (the first) at the Slade his maturity had left unimpaired the enthusiasm of his London Film Society days. I remember watching him in action with representatives of the Federation of Film Societies (another body under his wing) when he rubbed and rasped away at their prejudices in a way painful to behold but evidently agreeable to experience. This had been preceded by a period in charge of the United Nations Film Unit when, like Rotha after the war, he had expected to see fulfilled the wartime hopes for the world embodied in much of wartime film-making. It was not to be. As Grierson found at UNESCO and Rotha in his brief period at the BBC, the postwar bureaucracies have been able to develop techniques vulnerable to the ambiguities of words and resistant to the precision of images. Thorold was less aggressively militant than either Paul or John, and he had his successes, but to manoeuvre the big controversial issues between the vetoes was too much for even his considerable ingenuity.

When she asked me to write this article, Penelope Houston mentioned that Rotha and Dickinson might seem to be men of the 1930s and 40s 'whose film-making ended sooner than one might have expected, but who were always presences everyone was aware of.' Fair enough comment, but an earlier question about whether 'both, perhaps, may have been dissatisfied with the work they did for the screen—not the quality of it but the fairly sparse output, long gaps between films,' deserves examination.

Rotha and Dickinson each made a contribution to the allied war effort which was unsurpassed and included in Thorold's case two years spent organising the Army Kinematograph Service Production Group and producing an armoury of military training films. Rotha through his own unit was making films designed to sustain the morale of the 'home front' but significantly, even before the end of the war, was looking towards the social organisation of the postwar

world which many of us believed must be such (and could be such) as to justify the sacrifices which had been demanded. The sacrifices had indeed been made with a degree of passionate dedication which becomes more and more unbelievable as the years and their miracle pass. (Only the other day an ordinarily sceptical contemporary volunteered that what was so extraordinary about the war was that it was the only time in his life he had enjoyed the daily pleasure of 'all being on the same side'.) Rotha's film *World of Plenty*—made while the fighting was still at its height—was a cogent demand addressed to the people of the United States as well as to British audiences and calling for a world policy for food production and distribution. Those who saw the film in Rotha's recent memorial programme at the National Film Theatre will I think agree that *World of Plenty* does succeed in promoting this startling notion as a rational necessity. A step was indeed taken in this direction after the war with the establishment under John Boyd Orr (who appears in the film) of the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations. Yet today politicians vie with each other in 'realism' as they complain of Common Market gluts and call for the distribution only of what can command its price in the 'free' market economy! Other postwar reforms, today dismissed as idealistic and simplistic, were presented in Rotha's postwar film *World Without End* (made for UNESCO in association with Basil Wright) and receiving strong support from Thorold Dickinson at U.N. Films.

Both Thorold and Paul optimistically emerged from the physical restrictions of the war to the wider horizons of peace. Neither had ever been the victim of nationalistic restrictions of the spirit and the war seemed to have broken down whatever barriers there were to the One World concept of American leaders like Franklin Roosevelt and Henry Wallace. I recall pursuing from club to club a shared interest in jazz music with Paul and Alistair Cooke in New York about two years before the war, and how relaxed we felt with American film colleagues whom we recognised as sharing our own view of film as a new international language which would come to be accepted across the world. Fifteen years later, with the war over and won and the way open to 'the century of the common man', I remember an especially convivial evening at the Leipzig Film Festival with Paul, John Grierson, Alberto Cavalcanti, Joris Ivens and other European documentary film-makers agreeing on the opportunities that existed but becoming increasingly emphatic about the means of seizing them. Paul was a master in this world but was diplomatically discouraged by Connie Rotha from asserting himself too trenchantly. Indeed such skill did she display in keeping the documentary peace that I have always since regretted that Paul did not find himself able to accept more help over the years from his female partners.

Thorold Dickinson, like Paul, was

prevented by infirmity from spending his later years out in the international film world which was his true habitat. While he was still exuberantly mobile I spent a short but altogether enjoyable time in Czechoslovakia with Thorold and his architect wife Joanna following a British film presentation. For the three of us who had lived through the shame of Munich and had now been given a chance to travel through liberated Czechoslovakia, free by a kind of miracle from the second-class ethnic status to which Hitler's edict had condemned every Czech, including of course our colleagues, it represented the kind of happy ending commoner in the feature film than in documentary. While it lasted it was none the worse for that, and a bubbling Thorold and a calm and shining Joanna were delightful fellow celebrants. Much of our time was spent with Czech film technicians and Thorold, remembering his near twenty years as Vice-President of his trade union, the Association of Cine-Technicians, and his spell as Chairman of the British Film Academy, felt very much at home amongst these central European fellow craftsmen—and particularly, as I seem to recall, when they were so pleased with Pat Jackson's *Western Approaches*, one of the war films we had brought with us. (In landlocked Czechoslovakia we suddenly realised that sea-girt is an exotically romantic concept.)

It is a tragedy that Joanna died so long before Thorold and that Connie and Paul parted before either woman could help to answer this difficult question which Penelope Houston has put to me. What about 'the gap' that Stanley Hawes feels so deeply in Australia when he remembers that it was Paul, and Paul alone, who opened the door for him, a door to distinguished film-making in Canada and a pioneering documentary role in Australia? What about Eva Orbanz who, writing from Berlin, clearly feels the need to mark the end of something. But the end of what? Paul had a long and fruitful life which I am sure he felt ready to leave. *No Resting Place* was for him something more than the title of one of his features. The silent German films of his youth had left him with a sense of the penalties as well as the rewards of the attempt at an isolated stance outside class and country. Thorold too had had the best of it and was staying on more from his sharp sense of duty than for any other reason. I doubt if either man measured his achievement in films made and the quality of them, or indeed in any purely personal terms. Rather I think they may have asked whether film-makers as inspirers of social development should have been better prepared and armed against the reaction of the 70s away from community morality and back to the old ruthless struggle for individual power in a privately owned 'society'.

It could of course just possibly be that Paul and Thorold got ten years out of sync with their most likely postwar opportunity, and that Channel 4 yet will benefit from wisdom passed on through the many young men and women they taught? What they did will not end. ■

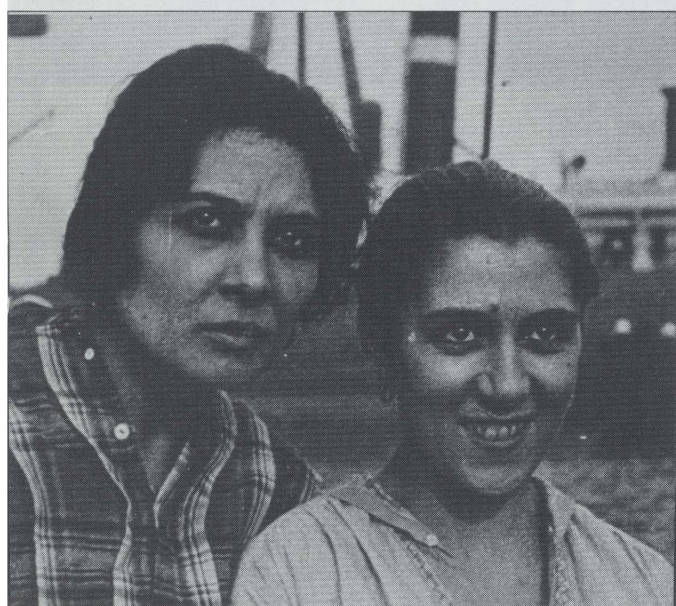


L'Hirondelle et la Mésange

Scenes from André Antoine's
'lost' silent film, recently reconstructed
by Henri Colpi for the Cinémathèque
Française, which Kevin Brownlow describes
on page 163.

Left: Griet (Maylianes) and Michel (Alcover).
Below: The cityscape of Ghent.





Top: Griet (Maylianes),
Marthe (Maguy Delyac), aloft,
and the bargee (Ravet).

Above left: The sisters
Griet and Marthe.
Above right: Marthe toasts
the pilot Michel (Alcover).

Left: André Antoine
(back to camera) with
Alcover and Ravet.
Photographs:
Cinémaèque Française.

Peggy Ashcroft and India



Peggy Ashcroft's recent performance as the elderly spinster missionary Barbie Batchelor in the television serial *Jewel in the Crown* stirred the hearts of millions. Richard Ingrams, not easily moved from ridicule as television critic of the *Spectator*, signed off with: 'Miss Ashcroft's performance is a *tour de force* which deserves to win every available award for outstanding acting.' The *Standard* described her as 'plucky, vulnerable, slightly batty Barbie, bustling and muttering about her eccentric way like an anxious bantam hen, a truly lovable character.' And the *Times Literary Supplement*, striking perhaps the most suitable note, of real tragedy, described how 'dislodged from one bolt-hole after another... she nightmarishly tumbles from voluble robust decency into a fierce dumb despair—something Peggy Ashcroft's unsparing, compassionate performance, with its harsh, thickening modulations through chokings of shame and cloggings of bronchitis, rendingly conveys.' Barbie was even elevated almost to the status of a real person, by a Medical Briefing in *The Times* that praised the 'authentic medical detail' of Barbie's senility.

Now, at 76, after nearly six months' shooting, a delightfully alert Dame Peggy has just completed her role in David Lean's *A Passage to India* as Mrs Moore, another sensitive old lady unable to come to terms with herself in India. This is her third part in a film about India, the first being that of the determined, eccentric art-collector, Lady G, in Merchant-Ivory's enjoyable but insubstantial *Hullabaloo* over

Georgie and Bonnie's Pictures, who travels overland from Europe in pursuit of a Maharaja's collection of rare miniature paintings.

Peggy Ashcroft's near-obsession with India stole up on her only some ten years ago. Although she had read Forster's novel in her twenties, she had not been

Andrew Robinson

especially interested in literature about India; she had seen films by Satyajit Ray and Merchant-Ivory's *Shakespeare Wallah*, but she never imagined she would go there. It was reading Paul Scott in the mid-1970s that got her hooked. 'I said yes to Merchant-Ivory even before I had read the script, simply because I wanted to go to India passionately by then.'

The role of Barbie came to her when she overheard Christopher Morahan, the producer of *Jewel in the Crown*, discussing it on a telephone at the National Theatre. 'I want to be in it,' she said simply. 'I want to play Barbie Batchelor.'

Her part as Mrs Moore had a rather longer gestation. In 1967 Satyajit Ray had excited the trustees at Forster's college in Cambridge by his interest in filming *Passage to India*. Dame Peggy met Ray in England then and was 'enormously impressed' by him, but unfortunately Forster, by then nearly 90, had never been interested in a film of his novel, and the project fell through. After Forster's death, the same fate befell further efforts at persuasion of the trustees by Ismail Merchant. By the time

she was approached again, for Lean's production, her first reaction was that she could not go to India a third time. She was persuaded because, 'It's difficult to say no to Forster, Mrs Moore, Alec Guinness, David Lean combined. I think I felt that if I said no I would regret not having had a go.'

In the novel Mrs Moore, just arrived from England, is the mystical character, along with the Hindu pandit Professor Godbole (played by Guinness). It is of course her barely formed yet profound friendship with the young Doctor Aziz, established by a chance meeting in a ruined mosque while she is recovering from the atmosphere of the British Club in Chandrapore, and her later breakdown caused by her experience of the echo in the Marabar Caves, that continually affect the more shallow perceptions of all the other characters in the story; this despite her disappearance to England and subsequent death at sea halfway through the novel. She is identified, in an essay on Forster's fiction by Peter Burra, that Forster much admired for its subtle understanding, as 'an elemental character... who discovers on particular complicated occasions an unquestioning certainty about the truth of an event.'

Mrs Moore is physically rather blurred in the novel; Aziz sees her in the mosque as a red-faced old lady with white hair, and that is all Forster tells the reader about her appearance. 'I had an absolute picture in my mind of Barbie, as though she was someone I knew. And of course Scott describes precisely what she wore, almost to every detail. There are conflict-

ing things about Mrs Moore. I think of her as old but I have to reconcile the fact that she is Ronny's mother and not his grandmother.' As for her background in England, 'I see a lady with beads coming from the outskirts of some provincial city. Although I hadn't read about Forster's mother at that time I think there is a certain amount of her in Mrs Moore. She's awfully acid with Ronny; that relationship is a very strange one. And I don't think she ever would have been an Anglo-Indian. I don't think she could have stood it. She would never have married a military man.'

Disarming frankness is Dame Peggy's reaction when asked how she will turn out on screen. 'I don't know what I bring out. I have no idea how I appear as Mrs Moore.' She always regards herself as principally a stage actress, and although she is of course used to this aspect of film acting, she still finds it hard to accept. She has only just seen, for instance, all her finished performance in *Jewel*, some two years after it was shot. 'In the theatre you make the characters and then you present them. In films it's sort of instant coffee, instant acting, and you don't know if it's all going to fit together.'

It is interesting to compare the non-pukka figure of Barbie, told that she has 'the soul of a parlour-maid', with Mrs Moore. Morahan comments that 'Barbie represents what Scott takes to be the failure of the British Christian tradition.' Religion, and its lack of reassurance, the silence of India that both women feel in their different ways, is also essential to Mrs Moore. 'They're both Christian women. And they both have a deep questioning of their faith brought about by their being in India. But as characters they are entirely different. The only similarity I have allowed myself is that they both wear a cross around their necks. A tiny, unobtrusive cross, probably given at a christening or confirmation and never taken off.'

Peggy Ashcroft feels that 'It takes less imagination to evoke a Scott character than it does to plumb a Forster one.' Part of the reason is that they were attempting different tasks. 'Forster was trying to recreate what he felt like in India. He was obviously appalled by the British Raj. Whereas Scott was concerned with a specific happening in India, the exit of the Raj and the effect the Raj had on certain English people.'

A very clear comparison can be made if one considers the remarks in Forster's often quoted letter written in 1922 to his first Indian friend Masood (to whom *A Passage to India* is dedicated): 'When I began the book I thought of it as a little bridge of sympathy between East and West, but this conception has had to go, my sense of truth forbids anything so comfortable. I think that most Indians, like most English people, are shits, and I am not interested whether they sympathise with each other or not. Not interested as an artist; of course the journalistic side of me still gets roused over these questions...' While Scott could well have shared Forster's

sentiment about most Indians and English people, it is impossible to imagine him lacking interest in them as people; it is precisely his ability to draw such English characters convincingly that has attracted constant praise. Whether this makes Forster a true artist and Scott really only a superb journalist is difficult to judge.

Their contrasting sensibilities are well caught by Dame Peggy: 'Scott is very objective, whereas Forster is subjective; one is male, one is female, almost; one is factual, one is mysterious. Sometimes I think of Forster as being rather Chekhovian and Scott as being, perhaps, like Ibsen. There's much more of *War and Peace* in Scott than there is of *Passage*. The characters are, in a sense, to be argued about; he crystallises them and you can almost see them physically. Forster's characters have a lot of blurred outlines. Nearly all Forster's women are like this.'

Peter Burra describes *A Passage to India* as 'One of the most aesthetically compact books ever written, whose thought, like music's, cannot be fixed, nor its meaning defined.' Much of this music in the novel is in the relationship between Mrs Moore and Dr Aziz. Simply from faith in his good character, it is Mrs Moore who announces, to the horror of the British community, including her magistrate son, that Aziz must be innocent of the charge of assaulting Miss Quested in the Marabar Caves. She does this in the film too, but Lean allows an element of doubt to creep into what happened in the caves. Peggy Ashcroft is, however, 'perfectly certain that Forster meant Aziz to be totally innocent and to be completely unattracted by Miss Quested.' This is important to understanding Mrs Moore's friendship with Aziz, played by the rising Bengali actor Victor Banerjee with whom Dame Peggy acted in *Hullabaloo* (and cast at the suggestion of Satyajit Ray). 'Mrs Moore tells Aziz in the mosque that "God is here" and will see if she has taken off her shoes as she should in the mosque. That impresses Aziz. I think the fact that he can respond and feel at home with an Englishwoman is simply extraordinary to him. She could be his mother or a relation. They somehow meet because they are both perhaps a little naive and spontaneous, and they both want to like each other. But I would think that Indians would object to Forster's portrait of Aziz; they would say he makes him too silly by half. He's childlike.' This is the case; there have been persistent criticisms of Aziz as an 'inverted toadie' and Godbole as a 'clown'.

Peggy Ashcroft was away in India during the transmission of *Jewel in the Crown*, but she has naturally been gratified by the remarkable impact of the serial, and that of Barbie in particular. 'From the letters I've had it's as though everyone has known a version of Barbie. She's a very universal, yet a very individual character.' She has also been intrigued by the criticisms. Two of the most significant critical attitudes have been that Scott and the series do not do

justice to the Indian side during the period in question—this from Indians mainly—and secondly—this from critics as diverse as Enoch Powell, James Cameron and Salman Rushdie—that the whole story is not really about India at all. It could have been played out in English suburbia: 'In the hot-house atmosphere of a London suburb just as much as in the hot-house atmosphere of a hill-station in India,' to quote Powell, who was in India at the same time as Scott, and also in the army. Peggy Ashcroft is startled by this last notion: 'There is something suburban about the memsahibs, but they are deracinated suburban, having been upped in India to a different stratum. Therefore they're rather common and awful, and they think they are absolutely "it".'

Although Scott has not created an Indian like Aziz seen from the inside, Dame Peggy feels there are some well-drawn Indian characters: the Muslim Congress Minister M. A. Kasim, for instance. 'What fascinated me was the strange ambiguity of M.A.K., who was so respected by the British and yet they had to put him in prison.' In general she was surprised to find in India that Indians she met found the Scott novels 'extremely truthful', a feeling she shares, adding: 'He's pretty anti-British, although he presents you with some decent British people. The most decent and the most rounded is Sarah Layton. Her final comment is: "After 300 years in India how can we have produced such a damned bloody senseless mess?" I wouldn't say that was particularly waving the flag, would you?'

She was baffled by Salman Rushdie's strong, sarcastic attack on the 'Raj Revival' in the *Observer*, in which Scott's touch is said to turn all to 'pure lead'. Rushdie drew a direct parallel between the rape at the centre of the Raj Quartet, which he wrongly identifies as Scott's 'metaphor of the Indo-British connection', and the events in the Marabar Caves: a nonsense, since not even the alleged assault on Miss Quested is true, let alone rape. 'There's no question that she was raped. No one has ever suggested that she was. It's a ludicrous suggestion.'

What puzzles Peggy Ashcroft rather more is the revulsion of the public towards a quite explicit scene of sexual connection in *Jewel in the Crown*, when Barbie is accelerated towards her final bitter madness by the shock of her chance observation of adultery. This scene provoked strong complaints and defence in the letters pages of newspapers. Mrs Whitehouse herself was roused by it. A robustly amused Dame Peggy, perhaps echoing a little the disgruntled complaint of Mrs Moore about 'all this rubbish about love, love in a church, love in a cave, as if there is any difference', was amazed by the strength of feeling. 'When you think what excesses of copulation you see on the telly, why did that brief sordid glimpse upset her so? Do you think it's because Barbie witnessed it? Poor old Barbie. Do you think it was Mrs Whitehouse herself having a peep through the door?' ■

Some Notes On Method Actors

Hal Hinson



On the Waterfront: In the taxi, Rod Steiger and Marlon Brando.

Surly and muscular, with his mask of belligerent solitude, Marlon Brando is the Method's battered icon. For most, the Method begins and ends in Brando. He and the Method are synonymous to the extent that his style has become the Method style. It has become a part of him, a corner of his mystique. He is its apotheosis and its purest expression.

Encased in fifty pounds of disfiguring blubber, Robert De Niro in *Raging Bull* is iconographic in a shockingly different way. As an actor, De Niro is the heir to Brando's Method legacy. Both Brando and De Niro studied with Stella Adler and were involved in the Actors Studio. And, in both *The Godfather, Part II* and *Raging Bull*, De Niro's work intersected with Brando's in such a way that Brando became an element of the characters he played, a part of the raw material that he used to build the roles. In both films, De Niro works variations on themes laid down by Brando—in the same way that Brando played around with themes from older fight and gangster films to create his characters.

De Niro's characterisation of Jake La Motta in *Raging Bull* is a direct comment on Brando's performance as Terry Malloy in *On the Waterfront*—a combination of impersonation and critique. La Motta is De Niro's essay on Brando and the Method, and plopped in front of his dressing-room mirror, reciting the famous taxi-cab speech from *Waterfront*, he embodies all the changes that the Method has undergone since Brando's breakthrough in the 50s. De Niro has taken Stanislavski's notion of becoming a character literally, and in his most recent films there are only vestigial traces of an actor's performance in his work. Bloated and battle-scarred, as La Motta, De Niro carried Brando's realistic style to its logical extreme, to the point where the actor's genius is in his transformation. He is the Method's Dead End Kid.

With Brando's portrayal of Terry in *On*

the Waterfront, a new character emerged on the screen, an American character created with a liberating realism that found the words and gestures for the spirit of modern American life. American movies had given audiences stars like Cagney and Tracy, who performed in the vernacular but whose style of acting was still linked to the theatre. What Brando brought to the screen was different from earlier styles of performing which developed when acting was thought of not as an art but as a profession, and actors were appreciated more for their skill as entertainers than for their ability to plumb the depths of personality. Brando's blunt, half-articulate style was free of the cluttering rhythms of the stage and unfettered by the traditional theatrical techniques of moulding a character by shaping scenes and speeches in broad, dramatic arcs. Brando junked the idea of constructing a character out of a series of revelatory theatrical moments, and he orchestrated his emotions and worked them for effects in a way that was different from classical English actors like Gielgud or Redgrave or Olivier, who could weave a spell with their speeches and create a character out of the sheer music of their language.

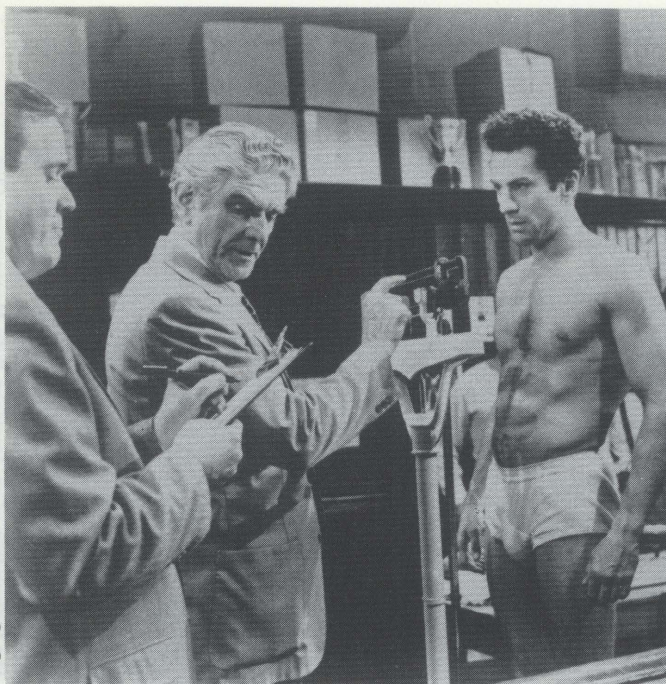
Instead, Malloy is conceived almost in miniature, as a cluster of details, in flourishes and doodles. Like a jazz musician flashing riffs of anger and confusion, Brando slides around in between the notes, playing the subtext and tossing in fistfuls of colour and shading with his shoulders and eyes, leaving Kazan (and Leonard Bernstein) to fill in the heavy melody on top. In *Waterfront* Brando soft-pedals Malloy and he never takes over the movie; his performance is always set to scale. In this regard his acting here is deeper and more subtly nuanced than his screen portrayal of Stanley Kowalski three years earlier. As Malloy, Brando gives us the impression that we can see the formation of his thoughts; it's like

watching bubbles push their way to the surface of an aquarium. As we watch Malloy become aware of the world around him, we can see the new ideas coming into his head and the way they ball him up. His performance turns *Waterfront* into a dawn of consciousness movie cut to the measure of an individual.

Brando had previously worked with Kazan on the film version of *A Streetcar Named Desire*, as well as the original Broadway production in 1947, and he brings a wealth of physical emotion and humour to the role of Kowalski. His body sends out shock waves which make his sexual bullying palpably terrifying. The characterisation is vibrantly alive, but it's still a great stage performance on the screen. By all accounts, Brando's stage presentation of Kowalski was a startling experience, so the vestiges of that performance that we see on the screen are not those of an ordinary Broadway actor. The performance is an anomaly, but it's an anomaly with a classical shape and scale. (In contrast, Vivien Leigh's Blanche appears to have been gauged more for the frequency of the camera.) Though Brando had been impressive in his debut with Fred Zinnemann in *The Men*, perhaps it took Kazan, who had himself been coached in the Method by Strasberg in the days of the Group Theatre, working on a project originally conceived for the screen, to teach Brando how to work for the camera, how to take the lessons of the Method and feed them directly into the lens.

It is through Kazan and his films that we can most clearly see the heritage of the Group Theatre of the 30s and the initial, undiluted impact of the first generation of performers who came out of the Actors Studio. It is ironic that the passion to build a national theatre which possessed the founders of the Group in 1931, the fervent drive to create a repertory theatre which embodied the principles of Stanislavski and the Moscow Art

Raging Bull: The contender, Robert De Niro.



Midnight Cowboy: Dustin Hoffman.

Theatre, which would rise organically out of everyday American life and move to its beat, should have such a profound effect on the movies.

Kazan's first love was the theatre. His dream—and the dream of his Group Theatre colleagues—was to revolutionise the American stage; it's a classic case of shooting for one target and hitting the bull's-eye of another.

'The whole idea of the Group Theatre,' Kazan once claimed, 'was to get poetry out of the common things in life. That was fired by the Depression and our reaction to it. Then there was another element: the Stanislavski system made us see more in the lives of human beings, and it became our mission to reveal greater depths. Also, at that time Freud had become popularised. All these trends came together in the Group Theatre.'

The influence of the ideas that Kazan carried over from his work in the theatre, his mission to 'get poetry out of the common things' and reveal greater depths, predetermined that he would make movies that were different from the conventional films of the 50s. More than any other director, Kazan carried the Method aesthetic into his movie work. The revolutionary approach to screen acting in his films, particularly those with Brando, has been the most profound influence on modern actors since the war. In 1958, Robert Lewis, who along with Kazan and Cheryl Crawford founded the Actors Studio, delivered the message that the Method was not a style but a process of training, a technique. Although Lewis' statement is in itself accurate, in retrospect his words ring with the naive assurance of a Baron Frankenstein who, having left his monster safely in chains, is unaware that it is ravaging the countryside. (Was Karloff the first Method actor?) Since its establishment in 1947, the Actors Studio, the high church of the Method, and other scattered parishes such as Sanford Meisner's Neighborhood Playhouse,

have nurtured and instructed an impressive ledger of performers—the cream of postwar American actors. Absorbing the Method as both a technique of training and a style, the film-makers and performers of the last thirty years have created a new vocabulary for contemporary screen actors—the language of a realistic American style.

This is not to suggest that the only important screen acting of the last three decades has been the work of Method artists. There's an understated honesty and solidity in the work of actors like Nick Nolte or Robert Redford or Gene Hackman who approach a character in a straightforward, uncomplicated way. (The rapport with the audience is uncomplicated, too.) On the other hand, Jack Nicholson's work as an actor is complex and contradictory—a mixture of shameless, eccentric grandstanding and charismatic subtlety. Nicholson has had some Method training and there's a realistic contour to his style, but he's not fussy about his effects, and he's too much of a ham to suppress his own personality. What Nicholson does with a character is not that different from the kind of well-grounded star acting that Bogart did in the 40s, and when the mix is working right for him, as it was in *The Last Detail*, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* and *The Border*, he can achieve the kind of depth and intensity that Bogart achieved in *The Maltese Falcon* and *Treasure of the Sierra Madre*.

Dustin Hoffman is perhaps the least naturalistic modern actor working in the movies. Hoffman makes an audience aware of the artifice that he's built into a character, and we never lose sight of the fact that we're watching an actor giving a performance. As an actor, Hoffman communicates directly with the audience; he lets us in on his thoughts about the role he's playing. He remains in character but, at the same time, he stands outside, commenting and interpreting. Hoffman

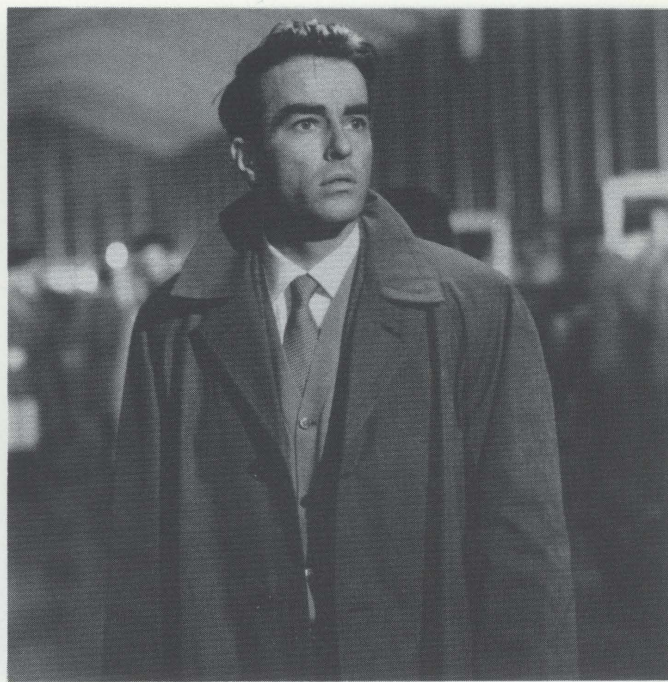
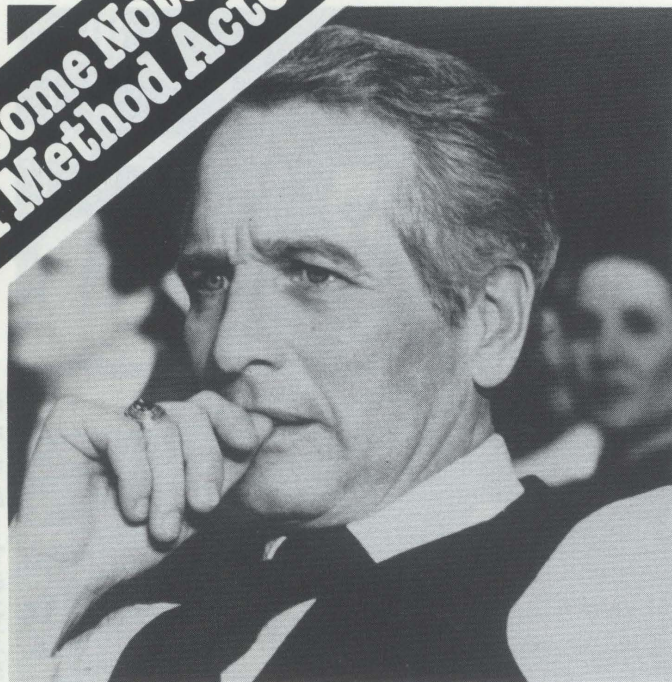
maintains a distance between himself and his characters, and he makes no attempt to transform himself from the inside in the way that an actor like Robert Duvall or Al Pacino does. Hoffman creates a stylised reality, and its effect is unlike that of any other American actor. And, as a director, Robert Altman doesn't have an approach to acting that's as systematic as the Method, yet the performances by Keith Carradine and Shelley Duvall in *Thieves Like Us*, Ronee Blakley and Lily Tomlin in *Nashville* and Karen Black in *Come Back to the 5 & Dime*, Jimmy Dean, Jimmy Dean, represent some sort of Stanislavskian ideal. Paul Newman represents another.

Newman has been associated with the Actors Studio since early in his career—he is its current President—and yet his name is seldom mentioned when the roll of Method actors is read. This is perhaps because when Newman sinks into a character, as he did in *Slapshot*, *Fort Apache*, *the Bronx*, *Absence of Malice* and, most recently, *Harry and Son*, he has such a relaxed, easy assurance that the seams don't show in the way we think they're supposed to in a Method performance. Newman has eased into a graceful, unpretentious kind of acting which is thought to exist outside the boundaries of the Method compound but lies, in effect, at its centre.

Newman is a rarity among modern actors with Method training in that he can flesh out the inner life of an ordinary man with a normal range of emotions, and show the petty cowardice, and the appeal, of a man who has settled for keeping his losses small; who is happiest when life demands very little of him and rewards him in simple ways—with a beer, an occasional lover or, best of all, by keeping his path free of obstacles. Newman is different from a Method actor like Al Pacino who cradles a character inside himself like an overprotective mother. He's turned outward, and he has

Some Notes on Method Actors

The Verdict: Paul Newman.



The Indiscretion of an American Wife: Montgomery Clift.

a generous, amiable spirit that connects with an audience. (Newman has a genuine warmth on the screen that's different from the pre-fab, good-ole-boy routine that Burt Reynolds pulls.) But for the same reason, Newman isn't able to shock us as an actor and stir up the antagonistic emotions that Pacino or De Niro can. With the exception of his bitter performance as the thorny sorehead in *Hud*, Newman hasn't been able to communicate the sense of danger that we seem to feel is needed before an actor can be elevated to the top rank of greatness.

Newman is too sane—too solid—to play the alienated loners that Method actors specialise in. Audiences could believe in Newman as the vulgar lout in *Hud*, or as the gentlemanly rogues in *Butch Cassidy* and *The Sting*, but not as characters with dark, psychopathic natures. (Though it's interesting to imagine him in a role where the distinctions are more finely drawn—like that of McMurphy in *Cuckoo's Nest*.) Newman can make normalcy appear juicy and attractive because there's nothing unresolved at the centre of his personality. There's nothing tragic about Newman, and he isn't remote in that distinctively modern way—he doesn't appear to be holding back any secrets. This makes him sound a little bland, and he's not. There more genuine feeling and less narcissism in his work than in that of most contemporary actors, and he knows how to give an audience pleasure without contradicting the terms of his character. It's simply that his personality on the screen isn't scaled to extremes of temperament. There's great zest in his graceful, laconic style but his eyes are clear and sharply focused—there's very little mystery in them.

Mystery and ambiguity are the Method actors' stock in trade. The characters they portray in their films are often surrounded by an aura of meditation—an aloof, wary silence, as if their souls were

packed in cotton. When John Garfield, who had worked extensively with the Group Theatre and whose style is an early Method prototype, made his movie debut in 1938 in *Four Daughters*, he deepened the film's melodrama by giving his fatalistic musician a watchful intensity that seemed to draw the energy of the movie to him as if he were a black hole in space. As Michael Corleone in *The Godfather* films, Al Pacino has the same magnetic stillness. In *Godfather I*, Brando used Vito Corleone's raspy whisper as a symbol of power; Pacino uses his malevolent quietness to show Michael's increasing preoccupation with his own moral decay. Michael's eyes burn in their sockets and his skin tightens over the bones in his face: watching him, we can understand how the hypocrisies of his father's world have twisted inside him. What had seemed natural, even honourable, to his father is to him a mortifying horror. The silence that surrounds him is filled with the crackle of flames licking at his entrails.

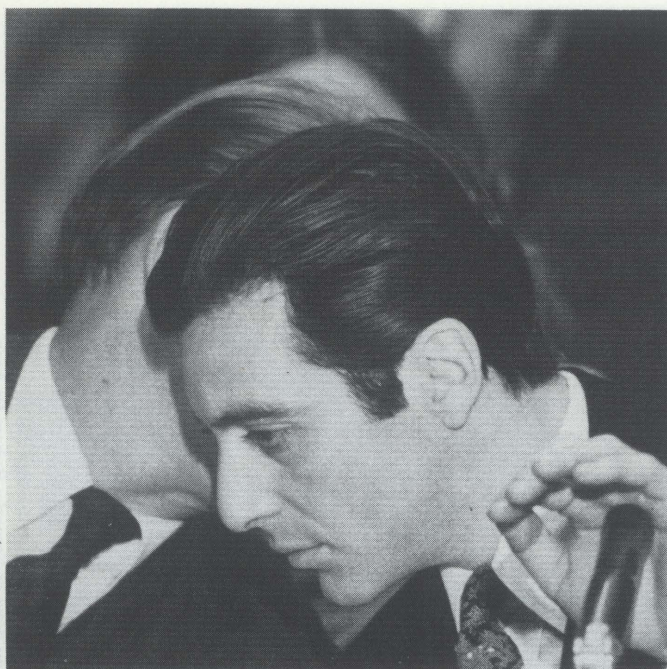
There is a cagey elusiveness to the Method actor's style. In *Bobby Deerfield*, Pacino's mirrored sun-glasses seemed to deflect his gaze inward, and the character was moody and self-concerned in a way that suffocated the audience's interest. Pacino was so enraptured with his own glamorous brooding that our involvement was superfluous—an invasion of privacy.

In movies like *The Search*, *The Heiress*, *Wild River* and *From Here to Eternity*, Montgomery Clift had a way of nestling a character within himself as if it were a secret, something to be hidden away, or so delicate that it would be bruised by the light. There is a coyness in the way that Clift worked on the screen; you felt as if he had to be seduced by the camera, that a performance had to be coaxed out of him the way you would coax a small child into telling you where he had hidden your car keys. You never felt that he revealed his character's personality directly—or

even intentionally—but instead let his emotions slip out almost by accident. Clift held himself in reserve; he seemed to cup his character's feelings inside himself the way a singer holds on to his notes and gives them resonance inside his body, and it gave his acting a tender pliability and softness. Clift had the ability to express the ambiguous areas of feeling where strength and vulnerability overlap, and he could make weakness appear sexually attractive.

Clift gave himself over completely to the romantic passions in his movie roles—in the way that Garbo did—and he appeared to be more alive in his intimate scenes with women than at any other time. His dusty prairie encounter with Joanne Dru in *Red River* has a tossed-off, languid sensuality, but it carries such a potent sexual charge that you remember the meeting as being less chaste than it actually is. His appeal in *Red River* is casually sexy and more straightforward than in his other roles. In *A Place in the Sun*, his scenes with Elizabeth Taylor have a sweeping, operatic scale to them. Yet somehow the passion that Clift expressed was always an immature passion; it had the adolescent exuberance that we experience when we fall in love for the first time and are as infatuated with the idea of being in love as we are with the object of our affection. In this sense Clift was a more complex, modern kind of romantic hero than had appeared before on the screen. Watching him, you felt that his avid longings were largely self-generated, and that his relationships with the women in his films aroused him in a way that had little to do with a desire for love or sex, but with a need to fulfil himself on a deeper, almost spiritual level.

In the same way that Pacino keeps getting tangled up in the web of his own private reveries, Clift seemed to lose himself in his emotions in a way that cut him off from the other characters in the movie. In *The Indiscretion of an*



American Wife, Clift wears an oversized top-coat that floats around him like a billowy, grey cloud, and his despair over the departure of his mistress seems to have sapped all the strength from his muscles. His shoulders sag and he has the soul-depleted look of a feverish child, but when he stares into Jennifer Jones' eyes, it looks at times as if he is trying to remember who she is. His passions are deeply felt, and he communicates them to the audience, but they don't seem to have much to do with her. Clift marked off the melancholy feelings of the anguished lover as his special province. On the screen, he played martyr to an unattainable love whose only object is itself.

An actor like Robert Duvall is self-regarding in a different way. Duvall appears to value realistic behaviour on the screen as an end in itself rather than as a means to bring a character vividly to life. Duvall's way of creating a character is minimalistic. He's like a haiku artist trying to prune away the excess syllables and get down to the essence. In *Tender Mercies*, and his other starring roles in *The Great Santini* and *True Confessions*, Duvall has locked himself into an almost documentary approach to acting that doesn't allow him to relax and work naturally out of his own impulses. Duvall rations out a character, and he demands that we accept him on his own terms—as if to give in to an audience's need for emotional involvement would violate the purity of his performance. Duvall's style is hermetic and he seems indifferent to the audience; his work is technically proficient in a workmanlike, dispassionate way, but he never seems to reach the level where the character takes off on its own and comes to life within the world of the film. There's something clenched at the heart of a Duvall performance, and it makes the souls of his characters seem musclebound and inaccessible. For Duvall, acting seems less an expression of feeling than of will. Some of his public statements have taken on a cussed,

evangelical tone. He's beginning to come across as the G. Gordon Liddy of movie actors.

The spirit of the 50s anti-hero was summed up by Brando as the motorcycle gang leader Johnny in *The Wild One*, who when asked what he was rebelling against answered, 'Whadda ya got?' The misfit character of the 70s rebel is epitomised by another Johnny, Robert De Niro's Johnny Boy in Martin Scorsese's *Mean Streets*. Certainly there is no other performer in film who personifies the nightmare image of America's violent underbelly more completely than Robert De Niro. In his films with Scorsese, and in *The Godfather* as well, De Niro has emerged as America's fantasy *doppelgänger*. In these films, De Niro is the manifestation of the irrational, of unhinged, free-associated chaos, and perhaps no other image more accurately captures our age.

It's possible that no other actor has ever disappeared into a character the way De Niro does. There's no distance between him and the part he's playing; the identification is so complete that the distinctions between actor and role become blurred—he enters a character the way that a somnambulist enters a trance. His technique is invisible and there's a kind of perfection in the way he integrates every aspect of a performance, without revealing the machinery of control. His characterisations have an awe-inspiring wholeness; he raises acting to the level of spooky magic.

Yet there is something niggardly and unsatisfying about De Niro's work. There's a rigid, unyielding quality in his style as an actor, an unwillingness to express anything below a character's surface. De Niro discourages empathy and he appears to be uninterested in communicating the inner life of a character in a way that reveals motive. As a result, there's no way to get a clear fix on his characters. He's emptied him-

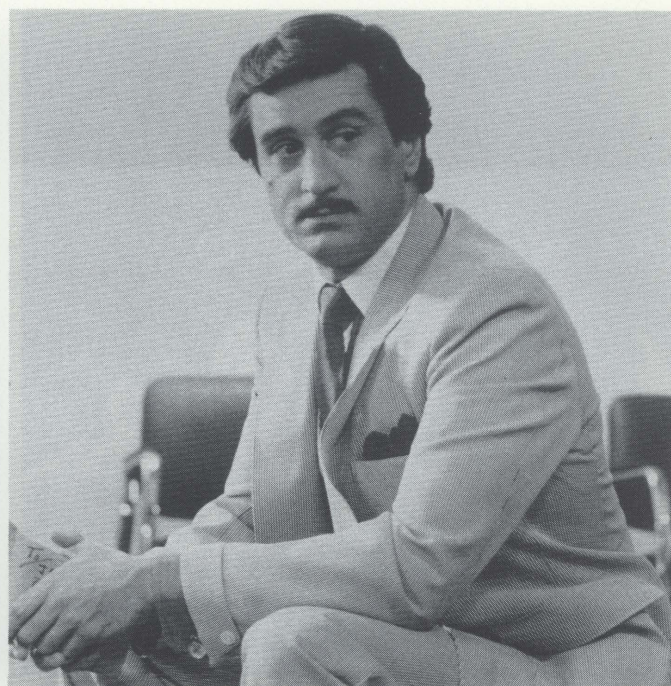
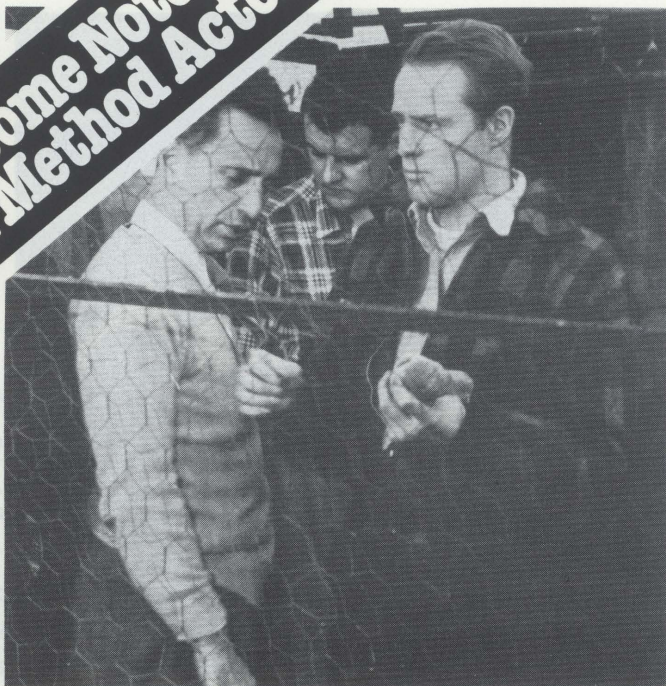
self out and all he shows us are the missed connections. (His performance in *The Godfather II* is the one great exception; it represents the only time in De Niro's career that—for example, in his portrayal of Vito Corleone's love for his children—he has shown emotion that registers on a normal scale.) De Niro pulls us into the minds of his displaced loners, but it's the ghostliness of the terrain that's so unsettling.

In this regard, De Niro is the least psychological of Method actors. He doesn't appear to be as interested in puzzling out a character's inner life as he is concerned with expressing the mystery of personality. In *Raging Bull*, De Niro tells us that a man like Jake La Motta is impossible to know, and that we are wrong to expect to understand a character's drives and motives. De Niro leaves large patches of La Motta's character unresolved and the implication behind his approach is that no one, not even the character, can explain a person's actions. De Niro conveys the absence of thought, and he shows us to what extent we are the victims of the unconscious forces in our nature. If in *Waterfront* Brando opened a door to Terry Malloy's mind, in *Raging Bull* De Niro goes a step beyond—he opens the door and there's no one home. When La Motta is imprisoned and beats his head and hands against the wall of his jail cell, it is as if he were trying to break through to himself.

As Travis Bickle in *Taxi Driver*, De Niro is a sinewy ghoul with something dead behind his eyes, and Scorsese uses a garish, expressionistic style as a corollary to Bickle's vision of a festering, hypnotic inferno; watching the film, we can feel its images pile up on our senses. The city gets to us the way it gets to Bickle—it crawls inside us and we can't shake it. We participate in Bickle's intensifying alienation, and by the time he explodes we recoil only slightly from the violence of his eruption because our reflexes are so in sync with his.

Some Notes on Method Actors

Marlon Brando and Elia Kazan.



The King of Comedy: Robert De Niro.

In *Raging Bull*, Scorsese goes even further in his use of the camera for characterisation. In both films, De Niro is the blank surface on to which Scorsese projects his vision. In *Raging Bull*, Scorsese and cinematographer Michael Chapman take the film's action apart; they slow it down or telescope it, splintering it to record specific, abstract fragments—the shape of a bicep, the texture of a glove, the flashbulbs and the glistening sweat. Scorsese lures us inside the character's head in the same way that he pulled us inside Harvey Keitel's boozy vertigo in *Mean Streets*. By focusing on specific details, he creates a picture of the world as La Motta perceives it and we can see how isolated impressions ride into his head. He reveals something more basic than thought—he shows how the mind records experience.

Our identification with La Motta, however, never comes into focus. De Niro pulls him away from us and we're asked to accept him as an animal, as the sum of his impulses. When La Motta recites Brando's famous cab scene from *Waterfront* into his dressing-room mirror, the words are hollow and inexpressive, and we're meant to think that La Motta doesn't possess the richness of spirit to do justice to the mongrel poetry in Schulberg's monologue. (De Niro's extraordinary weight gain of 50 lbs indicates a similar bankruptcy of imagination; it's the same kind of artistic literal-mindedness that led Werner Herzog to drag a real boat over the mountain in *Fitzcarraldo*.) De Niro's approach to character is reductive, almost ascetic; it's not acting, it's behaving. De Niro insists on preserving the mystery at the core of personality, and his reticence seems to indicate that to delineate anything other than a character's exterior would be dishonest. His attitude suggests that the psychological pegs an actor uses to get a handle on a character are facile and even fraudulent—that acting is a lie.

The belief that the human personality

is a cloudy, impenetrable chaos is a valid one, but in *Raging Bull* it's not a satisfying conclusion because you feel that it has less to do with the character of La Motta than with the limitations of the film-makers' approach. Scorsese has built the film around De Niro to such an extent that his spectacular technique has evolved into little more than an extension of the actor's characterisation. In *Taxi Driver*, Scorsese conceived a vibrantly sleazy, reptilian city and a group of characters for Bickle to react to and to reflect his disaffection. In *Raging Bull*, La Motta's feelings about the people around him and his own suffering are blunted and unformed, and the movie gets boxed up inside his head. Scorsese wasn't able to detach himself from the character and create a context within which La Motta's existence might attain some resonance. De Niro vanished somewhere inside La Motta's bruised soul, and he sucked the movie in with him.

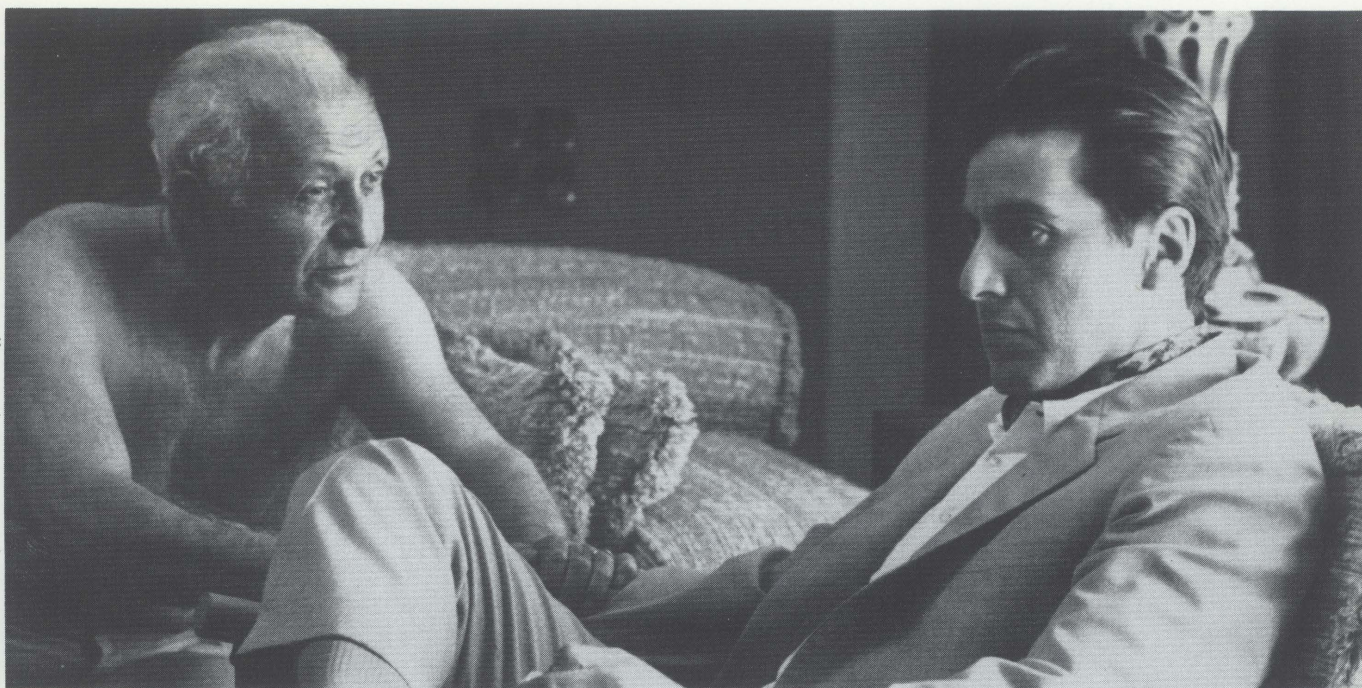
In *The King of Comedy*, De Niro's approach is even more problematic because Scorsese was unable to find a style to complement the performance, and the character of Rupert Pupkin remains as much a cardboard figure as the cut-outs of Jerry Lewis and Liza Minnelli in his bedroom. Pupkin's life, like Bickle's, runs parallel to society without intersecting; he's cut off from the world at the most rudimentary level, and his only personality is the fake-convivial, 'on' personality that he has picked up from television. But only in Pupkin's monologue does the pain of a man whose life is a shtick seep through. Pupkin turns out to be little more than a colourless reprise of the kind of sociopathic loony that De Niro has become synonymous with. Pupkin is a cliché—an ordinary crazy—and ultimately the film takes refuge in the irony of his sly half-smile at the movie's end. *Raging Bull* is a technically masterful but strangely soulless film; *The King of Comedy* is simply a dodge, an unpleasant, enigmatic

cop-out, and the film-makers' fix on Pupkin is as much a cheat as the pat psychological shorthand they wish to avoid.

De Niro represents the culmination, to date, of the Method tradition, and he has carried screen realism, at one end of the spectrum, to its apparent limits—to the cusp of autism. But his behaviourism has become a sleight of hand; it's a ruse. De Niro creates the same blank, puzzled feeling you get when you come across a super-realist painting that is perfect in every detail, but gives you no idea of what the artist's temperament is. As a result, his work as an actor can be frighteningly, electrifyingly authentic but, at the same time, inexpressive. De Niro's shadowy renderings deliver not the essence, but the style of personality.

The movies that De Niro and Scorsese have made together offer a contrasting parallel to Kazan's films with Brando. Kazan has said that the movie camera is not only a recorder but a microscope as well, and the performers in his films helped discover the possibilities that the camera opened up for actors. The performers who worked with Kazan and such directors as Martin Ritt and Sidney Lumet used the camera to create a realism on the screen that was more personal, and to fashion an almost telepathic intimacy with an audience. Scorsese and De Niro have worked out a new relationship between an actor and the camera, but the style of an actor like De Niro seems to fight against the camera's ability to pick up an actor's personality and make use of what he is as an individual. Lee Strasberg once claimed that the simplest examples of Stanislavski's ideas were those actors who 'tried not to act, but to be themselves.' The spacey deadness you feel when watching De Niro or Duvall is the result of the camera focusing in on the vacuum where the actor's personality should be.

The Godfather, Part II: Lee Strasberg and Al Pacino.



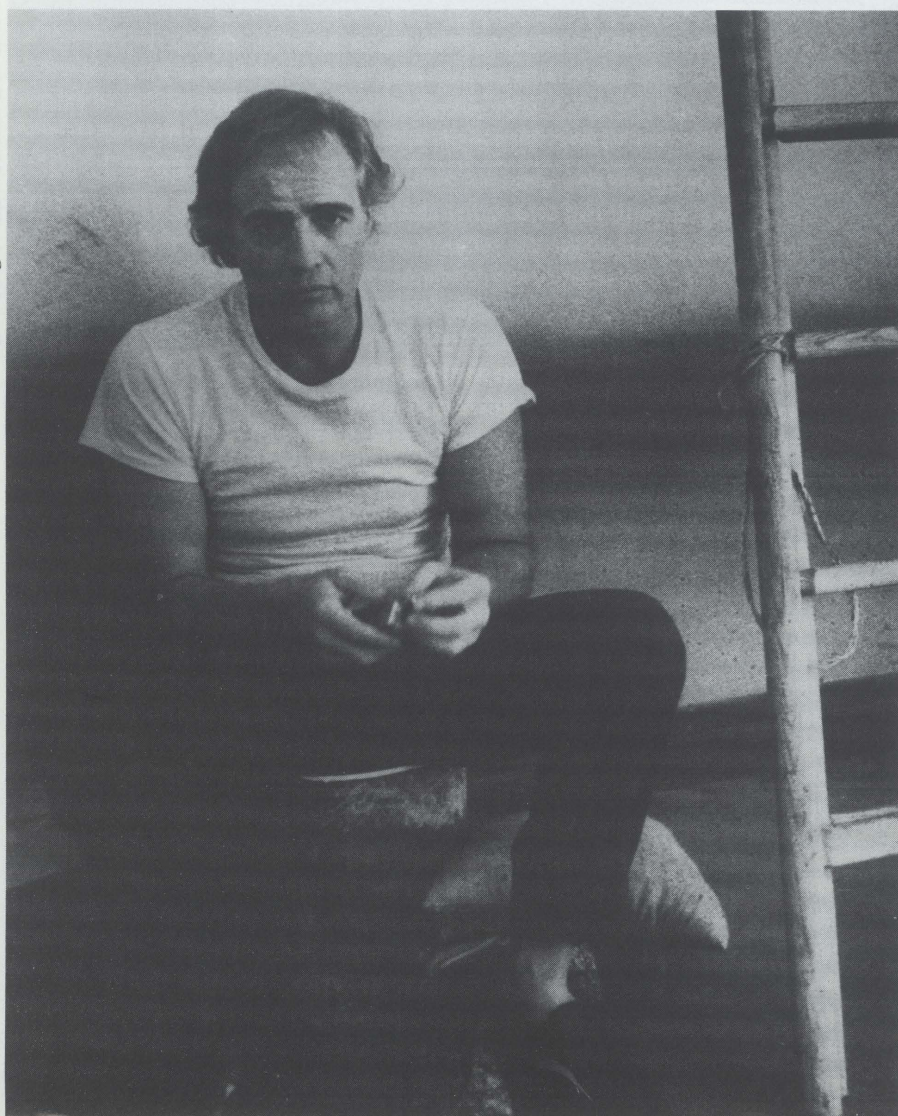
No American screen actor has ever worked more directly or more powerfully out of himself than Brando. As Paul in *Last Tango in Paris*, Brando delivers what his career had always promised—that he would strip away the last layers of artifice between an actor and his role to create the kind of expressive realism that is intensely personal, and yet transcends

the personal to reveal the universal. Brando doesn't use a role to blot out his own personality in the way that De Niro and Duvall do; he's present in a role—perhaps to an unprecedented degree. There's a distinct private ingredient to his style, and it is this element that gives his work its danger and immediacy. Brando merges with a character on a

deep psychological level, and the power of his acting comes not from his technical virtuosity or his ability to deliver a definitive reading, but from the way he internalises a role so that the gears of his own personality mesh with those of the character. When Brando is tapped into a role, it energises his own experience and opens the channels to emotional ideas that blaze and smoke when they hit the atmosphere.

In *Tango*, Paul is Brando's improvisation on himself. Bertolucci appears to have conceived the character as an extension of Brando, and the movie builds on our knowledge of him and our feelings about what he has come to symbolise to us. Bits of his public and private lives and associations from old movie roles flood into the characterisation. (The scene in which Brando and Maria Schneider substitute animal noises for their names looks like a sexy variation on the improvisations handed out at the Actors Studio.) The personal details in the character work to create an atmosphere of risk. We're involved emotionally because we sense that something deeply private is being worked out, and our feelings are intensified by the fact that it's Brando on the screen. When Paul slips into communion with the memory of his humiliation at a high school dance, the recollection appears to be as much a part of Brando's past as it is of Paul's. We're aware of Brando, but in a way that enlarges our understanding of Paul. Actor and character are united in the same soul, and the effect is exhilarating. Brando's characterisation of Paul creates the same feeling of unrestrained candour that we experience in conversations with lovers or friends when dark secrets are shared, public masks fall away and, perhaps inadvertently, we are faced with more than we bargained for. Brando's work in *Waterfront* and *Last Tango* has the weight of great confessional poetry. It represents the pinnacle of the Method actor's art. ■

Last Tango in Paris: Marlon Brando.



'When I work with Fellini, I don't speak dialogue, I merely count—uno, due, tre . . .' **LINDA POLAN**, who played the mezzo soprano in *And the Ship Sails On*, recalls her time on the 'Gloria N'

WITH FELLINI



Best friends: Elisa Mainardi and (right) Linda Polan.

It is November in Rome. Six o'clock in the morning. I sit in the back of a huge limousine which takes me to a disused pasta factory. Inside are hundreds of people, men and women in various stages of undress. A young woman leads me to a big room with a row of mirrors along its wall. I sit in front of one of these and close my eyes. I try to relax. Something cold is smeared on my eyebrows. An old woman has approached. She is carrying a small plastic bowl. She gestures to me to keep my eyes shut. A man with a sponge smears my face with grease and powder. Someone scrapes the cold wetness from my brows. I open my eyes. My eyebrows have disappeared. I want to cry. Dozens of people mill about, speaking a language I do not understand. A man with a box of tiny black hairs, each two centimetres long, attaches four to my upper eyelid, two underneath. He is dissatisfied. He removes all six with tweezers. He begins again. I am led to another room with mirrors. Two women brush and comb, pull and tug my hair into an eccentric,

asymmetric shape. They are not satisfied. After five attempts they secure my hair with many pins.

The young woman returns, and takes me to a caravan in the yard at the back of the factory. She mimes that I should take off all my clothes and wait. Outside people are whispering, shouting, gesticulating. I can communicate with no one here. Eventually, a beautiful young man comes in, carrying what seems to be a large bundle of rags. He gestures to me to stand and hold out my arms. He laces me into a flesh-coloured corset, until I can hardly breathe. He flings the rags over my head; drapes them round my body. He stands back. Observes. He adds flowers to my shoulder and jewels in my ears and wrists. From a velvet bag at his waist he takes strings of pearls and silken gloves. I put them on. He stands back, shakes his head and leaves. I wait; unable to sit down now, due to the tightness of the corset. I decide to look for my friends and make for the door of my caravan. As I approach it, I see, coming towards me, a

magnificently handsome grotesque. Part Montserrat Caballé, part Marcel Marceau. The door is mirrored. It is me.

A man comes through the door carrying a huge hat. He places it upon my head at various angles, chooses the one he likes and pins the hat with four enormous hat-pins. If the only way to keep the hat on is to stick those pins right through my skull, then I can tell by the look on his face that is what he will do! He stitches a bird's nest filigree of ribbons to the hat, and a flower. He twitches at my clothing, pulling here, lifting there. I am passive, exhausted. He peers into my face, lifts a strand of hair and cross-eyedly examines me for what seems like hours. He shakes his head as though to ask 'What am I supposed to do with this terrible raw material?' I wonder if he'll suggest plastic surgery, or, worse, have me sent home. Rejected, unsuitable, Not Wanted on Voyage. For this is certainly a voyage. Of Discovery. It is my first day on the 'Gloria N'.

My journey is to last from November to

March, and the captain of the ship is a man I had met in London six years previously. 'One day,' he had said, 'we will work together perhaps. Who knows. Oh, by the way, you have very beautiful eyes.' Such a compliment from a Master. If he doesn't know what are beautiful eyes, then no one does. I never expected to meet him again. Once in a lifetime, plus a compliment, is more than most people could hope for. But here I am, six years later, making my contribution to *E la Nave Va (And the Ship Sails On)*.

I waited in my caravan the rest of that day, leaning on a shelf, unable to sit or stand in comfort. Someone brought me a bottle of mineral water from which I took sips. I wondered what would be required of me. There was no script. I didn't really know what the film was to be about—just the outline of a story which Fellini had sent to me before I left London. 'A group of artistic people make a journey, by boat, to an Adriatic island. Many of them are opera singers. They carry with them the ashes of a dead colleague, the most famous Diva in the world. You will play the part of the mezzo soprano.'

I took more sips of water and tried to read a book. Lunchtime came and went, but no food was brought. At about five p.m. I was taken to a part of the factory yard that had been dressed to look like a quayside. I got into a carriage drawn by two horses. Another woman sat there with me, dressed like myself. She only spoke Italian. We smiled at each other.

Someone shouted 'Action,' and the carriage clattered along the cobbled yard. Since I didn't know who to be or how to feel at this point, I put on a Suitable Face for a Funeral, and hoped it was appropriate. Later, I learned that if Fellini says nothing he is satisfied. If he is not pleased he will tell you and it will be done again, until he is.

After four or five attempts, the carriage shots were completed to his satisfaction. He came over to the carriage to help us out. He welcomed us most courteously and warmly, speaking to us both as though we were the most important people in his life at that moment. He introduced me to the other actress—Elisa Mainardi. 'You will play Best Friends. Always seen together.'

Of course, not every day was so strange or new and seemingly chaotic as that first day at the pasta factory. The following week we started work at the studios, Cinecittà, and life on the film settled into a kind of routine. Not like anything I had experienced before, but it was regular.

I sometimes wondered why Fellini didn't work out a schedule so that we might know when we were not required, but the manner of his working process needs everyone and everything to be on hand all the time. He works like a painter. Uses performers like tubes of paint. Sometimes he will squeeze a lot of your colour on to his canvas, sometimes a very small amount. Then he places that shade at his side. He may not need it again that day, or even that week, but he needs it close by—just in case.

At lunchtime, boxes of food were sent in for the English actors. The others

brought their own, or struggled to the bar to queue for a dry sandwich and a coffee. Then stand to eat and drink. The vast majority of people in the film were not actors at all. 'I choose people for their eyes, their shape,' Fellini says. 'If they can act, well, it just means that they can do what I want a bit quicker... sometimes.'

I heard that as soon as it is known that he is to make a film huge queues form outside his office. Rich society women, students, beggars, faded failures, success-hungry youths with cash-register eyes. My make-up artist had excellent English. He pointed to the woman in the next chair. 'Thirty years ago she and her lover, the Chief of Police, murdered her husband, a government official. She went to prison, you know.'

Another woman told me she was recently widowed. 'They sent my husband to Sicily. He was murdered of course.' An American drunk who'd come to Italy twenty years before in search of fame as an opera singer... A middle-aged, asexual Englishman, youngest son of a noble family he intimidated, sent to Europe thirty years ago by a family who wanted to be rid of him... A student of the cello... An international expert on Renaissance art... A Polish refugee... A beachcomber from Fregene... Off the set was just as Fellini-esque as on it.

Although there never was a script or screenplay, I was given a synopsis of the film. It was like a poem:

A woman yawns...

In the outstretched arms of a sailor a satin cushion...

The Count shakes his beautiful head...

Caressingly, he looks...

The Serbs huddle in a black mass... Famished eyes...

The Grand Duke plays chess with his sister who is blind...

Making these words into pictures was the primary task of each day. Light, space and matter were cajoled, threatened, juggled, placed, replaced, moved, removed until the composition matched exactly what the words meant to their inventor. There seemed not to be a grand design to the method, but, rather, an inspired, improvisational vision, moving so rapidly that it often remained obscure even to those who had worked with him before. An act of supreme concentration is required if one is to understand his thought processes, and one should attempt this at all times. If people seem slow they can incur his wrath which is momentarily terrible, but quickly forgotten.

In Italy everyone knows Fellini. The bus conductor, the waiter, the shop assistant. And his name is a sort of magic word. When my purse was stolen and I had to report to the police, they were supremely indifferent. 'Another careless tourist,' they obviously thought. But when the actor who accompanied me, incensed on my behalf, said, 'Miss Polan isn't just here on a vacation, you know. She's working with Fellini,' the policeman called me Madam and brought me a chair and a cup of coffee.

Sometimes acting was merely a case of doing as I was told. 'Lean on the rail, Linda, look out to sea. Notice a dolphin. Tell the others. Listen to a boring man. Don't let me see that you feel sick.' Other times he would describe a scene and tell the actor which emotions he wanted him to go through. 'Shall I talk you through it, or would you like to feel it from the inside?' he would ask. Whichever you chose was fine, as long as you didn't take too much time.

One day, in the first week, I asked him to tell me something of the character I was playing. 'What sort of woman is she?' His reply had the immediacy of a brilliant improvisation. 'Successful, talented, accomplished. She gets to play all the roles suited to her. She'll never be great, she spends too much time and energy on other things; being a wife, a mother, a friend. She could have been a wonderful butcher or baker. Do you understand?' Oh, yes, I understood. It could have been a description of me.

This gift of 'knowing' has been woven into the fabric of the Fellini myth. 'He has second sight, you know. He can read people's minds.' Italians seem to need this sort of explanation. For myself, I do think that the spiritual side of his nature is highly developed so that he is very receptive to the lives and feelings of others. And, most important for the artist, he has never learned to deny the paradoxes within himself.

There were, of course, as in the rest of life, things to be confronted, dealt with and overcome. I have a deep-seated fear of being in a place where I am not understood. The language was a problem for me. I am not very quick, but I did manage to learn enough to understand everything that was said concerning the making of the movie. My other fears are water and heights, so making a movie about a ship that sinks did give some nervous moments. Happily, it was not necessary for anyone to go in the water, but we didn't get to that scene till the middle of March, and I could never bring myself to ask about it beforehand.

When we arrived one day to do the scene where the opera stars sing for the engine stokers, and I saw the shelf, high in the air, on which we were to stand, and the rickety ladders lashed with string which led to the shelf, my stomach jumped up, lurched over and went back to its place again. I gave myself a firm talking to: 'That's not you going up there. It's a world famous mezzo soprano, and she's not afraid of heights.' It worked like a charm. I went up the ladder with confidence, as fast as my hobble skirt would allow. And when I arrived I even managed to sing.

One of Fellini's methods concerning sound is immortalised in Truffaut's *Day for Night*. 'When I work with Fellini,' says the actress, 'I don't speak dialogue, I merely count—uno, due, tre...' On *E la Nave Va* someone asked: 'But Federico, when you post synch this film, surely, nothing will match.' 'If people are observing properly they do not watch mouths,' he replied, 'they are looking at the eyes. And anyway, it's all a fantasy.' ■

Two Turkish films which at first glance seem to have little in common were shown at the 1983 London Film Festival. In fact Yilmaz Güney's *The Wall* and Erden Kiral's *A Season in Hakkâri* seem to be almost opposites. *The Wall* shows life in a Turkish prison through a patchwork of small details and scenes which speak of an intimate identification with that life. The main centre of interest is a group of boys, but the camera's eye does not bring an individual consciousness into focus and it is scarcely able to escape the confines of the prison walls itself. This consolidates the feeling of participation in a social microcosm with all its passions.

The psychological type of *Hakkâri* is quite the reverse: here there is a distinct observing consciousness, an emaciated teacher who is posted to a village in the far South East of Turkey, high in the most remote wing of the Taurus Mountains. He comes as an outsider and spends more time questioning his own role than working with the children: how can an intellectual ever communicate with villagers for whom life's limits are entirely different? And in this particular case, how can he even survive, given that the season of the title is winter?

To the introvert, *The Wall* seems like a mass of random life, of overstated emotion tinged with that radical paranoia which blames 'them' for every aspect of personal malcontent and yet has little sense of self-consciousness, structure or direction. To the extrovert, *Hakkâri* seems not to be about anything, just a self-centred individual with little social or political consciousness lost in those scenic mountains that make the Western world believe it is seeing the 'real' life of Turkey, inaccessible even to the most determined tourist.

Nevertheless, there are common themes partly concealed in the different approaches and statements, which show these differences to be complementary suggestions, variations in the way that Turks talk to one another about themselves and their country—and to outsiders. In looking at this balance of differences, the foreign viewer is able to start building the common ground and so to overcome the flimsy foundation of the gross prejudices witnessed for instance in *Midnight Express* and not dispelled by the more brutal aspects of *The Herd* or *Yol*. Clearly, this viewer cannot hope to pick up instantly the social gestures and cultural references of an unfamiliar country, but if he is willing and able to recognise and suspend the presuppositions derived from his own culture, a space is created in which it is possible to begin to hear the language of the other culture. This is possible without needing a Clark, an Attenborough or a Bellamy to appear in the corner of the frame, to restore us to our own island, to relieve us of responsibility for our construction of Other.

The first of the common themes is confinement and the others, the confined and escape, follow. These are not the only common features, of course, but ones which are sufficiently prominent to give

BEHIND THE MOUNTAINS

Michael Cullingworth

an introduction to the way of thinking. It is also obvious that these are not features exclusive to Turkey—far from it. Constraint/freedom is, after all, one of the archetypal meridians by means of which humanity contemplates itself. The difference is in the choice of this meridian as characteristic, in the positioning on it or, to use another metaphor, the tilt given to the balance between one extreme and the other.

In both films confinement is a fundamental condition of life: each is played out within very limited boundaries with scarcely any reference to a world outside these limits. They are in this way very inward-looking films which discern gradations of restriction within the overall restriction. *The Wall* makes the statement bluntly, ideologically—Turkey is a prison within which all life takes place. We see birth (an explicit moment of happiness and hope), marriage (prepared for with gaiety, but turning out to be a cynical trick: instead of the registrar, soldiers are waiting to take the lovers to be hanged) and death (through the loss of the last residue of hope or through hatred). We see men, women and children following the segregated rituals of daily life—men's washday, not shown in detail; women's washday, shown in the nude: this is a male-dominated society. Here the boundaries are placed by the rigid hierarchy of the patriarchy, whose most powerful representative in the film is the visiting Director of Prisons. His function is not to listen to anyone and so by maintaining barriers to communication, to preserve the social distinctions. 'I've heard all your complaints before,' he tells the male prisoners, and when some are still bold enough to mention bad conditions and corruption, this results in their having their hair shorn off. When the women

ask if there will be an amnesty, the barrier to communication is placed more subtly by reference to a further remove of inaccessibility: 'The National Security Council knows best about that. Obviously we can't interfere in the Council's decision.'

The walls of silence are further held in place by violence passed down from the top. The warden does not listen to his warders and may dismiss them arbitrarily. The warders do not listen to the prisoners: applications for transfer are thrown in the stove, but more often a question, such as 'why are there always too few loaves?' is answered with a beating. (The only warder who does listen is the one dismissed.) And so it continues even through the prisoners: when the boys beg bread from fellow prisoners they are most often offered a kick, a clip or the all-pervasive verbal abuse. When one boy who has let his friends down tries to make it up, he too gets a knee and a boot.

In *Hakkâri*, the boundaries are set by the landscape, by the mountains themselves which exert violence and inhibit communication just as surely as social constraints. In fact, the social barriers are still present in the form of the village head-man, the Muhtar, who asserts his right to pre-eminence through arbitrary displays of economic power in acquiring a pair of boots, a generator and a second wife. But he is still subject to the landscape, just as a warder has to live the prison life—here natural constraint dominates artificial constraint and may even be thought to have created it, levels of control over and independence from the environment being the measure of power. It takes the teacher his whole season of duty to realise how much the lives of his schoolchildren will be determined by the parameters of working to survive the natural conditions. Beside



Young prisoners in *The Wall*.

the list of words they offer in their first writing class—mountain, glacier, mother, father, snow, dog, death, bread—such concepts as 'sea', which his broader culture can offer, are of little relevance.

In a previous Güney film, *Yol*, we saw the same or similar mountains, but their power to condition the lives of their inmates was not addressed. The difference is important as it bears on the second common feature: the confined. In looking at these people and in questioning the observer of them the limits of confinement are more clearly defined.

The mountains in *Yol* were visited from the outside, but by someone whose roots were there—in this way he was not an observer but a participant in the drama of the life, just like the prisoners of *The Wall*. The extreme climatic conditions were not called upon to help explain social or productive relations, nor even the extravagant emotional events. Instead, their vehemence was exploited to reflect and intensify the melodrama. This is a kind of emotional tourism, even sensationalism, a way of glimpsing the exotic without being compelled to live it out.

Hakkâri, by contrast, raises the issue of tourism deliberately and centrally through the figure of the teacher coming from outside and spending a limited time in the village. Not tourism as in the 15-day package, but the tourism of anyone with a safe home and life to return to. This the teacher addresses very early in his stay and in the brown lamplight records among his musings. There are many photos to be taken, he writes, if only he had that habit—pictures of barefoot children and hay-sledges and all the images that then are hung up far away on the safe, warm walls of the bourgeois. Long Live Photography! Long Live Culture! It might be suggested that

the director, Erden Kiral, has let his camera be seduced into lingering on details of the Muhtar's wedding or of the doubtless authentic, sumptuous costumes of the women, but the teacher himself is no tourist, in spite of being an outsider. He has a university background and a girlfriend somewhere, but as is apparent by the end, he has nowhere stable to go and has only his culture to rely on. He is another variation on the outsider—an exile. Exile in the sense of being posted to the far end of the country by authorities equally powerful, equally uncommunicative as those of *The Wall*; exile by his choice of profession that places him in the remote community; and exile as an intellectual among the uneducated.

It is worth remembering here that both Kiral and Güney are expatriates and that both the films display attitudes towards looking into and identifying with closed communities.

In both communities the reasons for membership are taken for granted. In the prison there is barely any discussion of crimes committed, the background of virtual inevitability being perfectly understood. One woman questions a new arrival and when told that she killed her husband with an axe (the greatest crime against a patriarchy) her response is merely 'Are you hungry?' And in *Hakkâri* there is a legend which tells that when God created the mountains they cried because they wondered who would ever see their beauty—they were too high. Then God pointed to the few settlers and the mountains cried again because those people had nowhere else to go. The people of both films are not so much exiles from a comfortable life as orphans who never had access to such a life. In *The Wall*, many of the boys are literally orphans and even here there is a hierarchy: one

group of informers runs a miniature protection racket. Another boy, Şaban, whose fate the camera shows in more detail than that of the others, is sexually abused by Cafer, the most brutal warder, and when his friends encourage him to complain to the doctor, he fails at the last minute through fear and is subsequently ostracised by his friends. To be ostracised among orphans in a prison is too much for him to bear and he is shot trying to escape.

In *Hakkâri* too there are the orphans among the outcast—and the teacher identifies most closely with them. These are principally Zazi and her brother Halit. Halit is a smuggler thought to have been involved in the deaths of two Iranian merchants ('In the mountains there is no evidence'). He loves the mountains and claims to have two families, one in the village and one in Oramar, on the Iraqi border. But his comings and goings in the middle of the night, his hiding from the police, show that he has no real home. He belongs only on the fringes of the community. And Zazi is an orphan, as he says, because she is a woman in such a society—she is the Muhtar's wife. She has no security, no possessions—indeed she is a possession which can be discarded at will. This is demonstrated by the story of the Muhtar's second marriage, drawn out across the whole film from the moment Zazi discovers the rumour to be true, through her questioning of herself in the mirror and her discreet complaints, to her refusal to be a wife any longer after the appearance of the new bride and her eventual departure from the village. It is a departure which coincides with that of the teacher: one day a school inspector arrives to tell him his job has been well done, that he may shut the school in a week and go wherever he wishes. But he has begun to identify with this place as much as with any and no longer wants to leave, does not know where to go. Exiled again.

This presents the third common theme: escape. One of the aspects of being an exile/outcast/orphan is the corollary of the eternal confinement: there is nowhere to escape to. Certainly there are indications of another life, but these are extremely sparse and point only to something virtually unattainable. Not only is there complete silence on the question of where Zazi or the teacher will go as they leave with the thaw, but it is clear that the village children will probably never leave except for their military service (and that is not a time when one sees the world). Even the main town of the area is not much different: when there is an epidemic that kills many babies, the teacher is called on to play doctor. He writes to the provincial capital for medicine and a real doctor—but there is not even a doctor in the town, so what chance has the village got? The landscape again takes over and any sense of responsible authority, or even social concern, is removed to such a distance that contact is impossible.

The people of the village do not desire to escape, they are held by ignorance in

that place where even the Muhtar seems like a lord. But if they were to make a break for the seemingly more favourable city life, as is seen in other films, then, it is suggested by this comparison, they will simply be faced with the city version of the same overwhelming constraint: *The Wall*.

The inmates of the prison certainly long to escape, gazing wistfully at planes and birds flying freely over, but when the boys actually plan an escape, their imagination of what they might do outside does not extend beyond becoming gangsters with pockets full of guns and money, arms full of women—a dream only compromised by the speculation that the women might consider them a bit young. The eventual attempt ends with one shot and another severely beaten. The third, Ziya, dies after being beaten, but more as a result of losing his will to live. He escaped only as far as his old orphanage, where he found that Karabas, a local dog which was the only focal point for his sense of affection, had been poisoned by the authorities. He returns to prison with a vision of a totally loveless world, everyone running in the effort to survive—‘there’s no life for us anywhere.’ The point is further reinforced by ‘Uncle’ Ali, the warder sacked over the escape attempt. He returns during one of the rare visiting periods to tell how he has been unable to find work and he has to be dragged off, shouting.

The possibility of another world of comfort to that of the prison is offered only by the radio commercials which accompany the camera’s initial slow entry to the prison. But the world of banks and easy consumerism evoked by these is clearly separated from reality by a vast gulf—it is an illusion that again substitutes for responsibility and social concern. What is really required from this humanity is soon evident: appeals for blood are broadcast among the commercials. The blood donor unit arrives

and everyone, including the chief warder, joins the party—at least it is a change from routine.

Even the camera is unable to give any but a marginal view of a wider world. There are shots of the mist-shrouded outer walls, of the drive up to the main gates, of a similarly misty, restricted landscape as the boys go by van to another prison and a shot of lights across water as they approach it. Part of this may be the constraint imposed by production of the film in France, not Turkey; but once the choice to frame the film in such terms has been made, it is the effect of the framing on the world of the film which counts. Similarly, the camera of *Hakkâri* catches fleeting glimpses of the nearest town, but is otherwise held in thrall by the mountains, unable to show another world to which escape might be made.

At the beginning of *The Wall*, the boys wish on the new moon: ‘Lord, send me to a better jail.’ They have heard that at one prison they can play football and at Izmit there is television and a view across the bay: their most realistic hope is for transfer. When eventually they achieve this aim by rioting and by suffering a beating of graphically sustained brutality, the ambiguity of their gain is revealed. Before the benefits of the new prison are known, they are separated from half their friends (sent elsewhere) and subjected to a new sequence of cruel rituals.

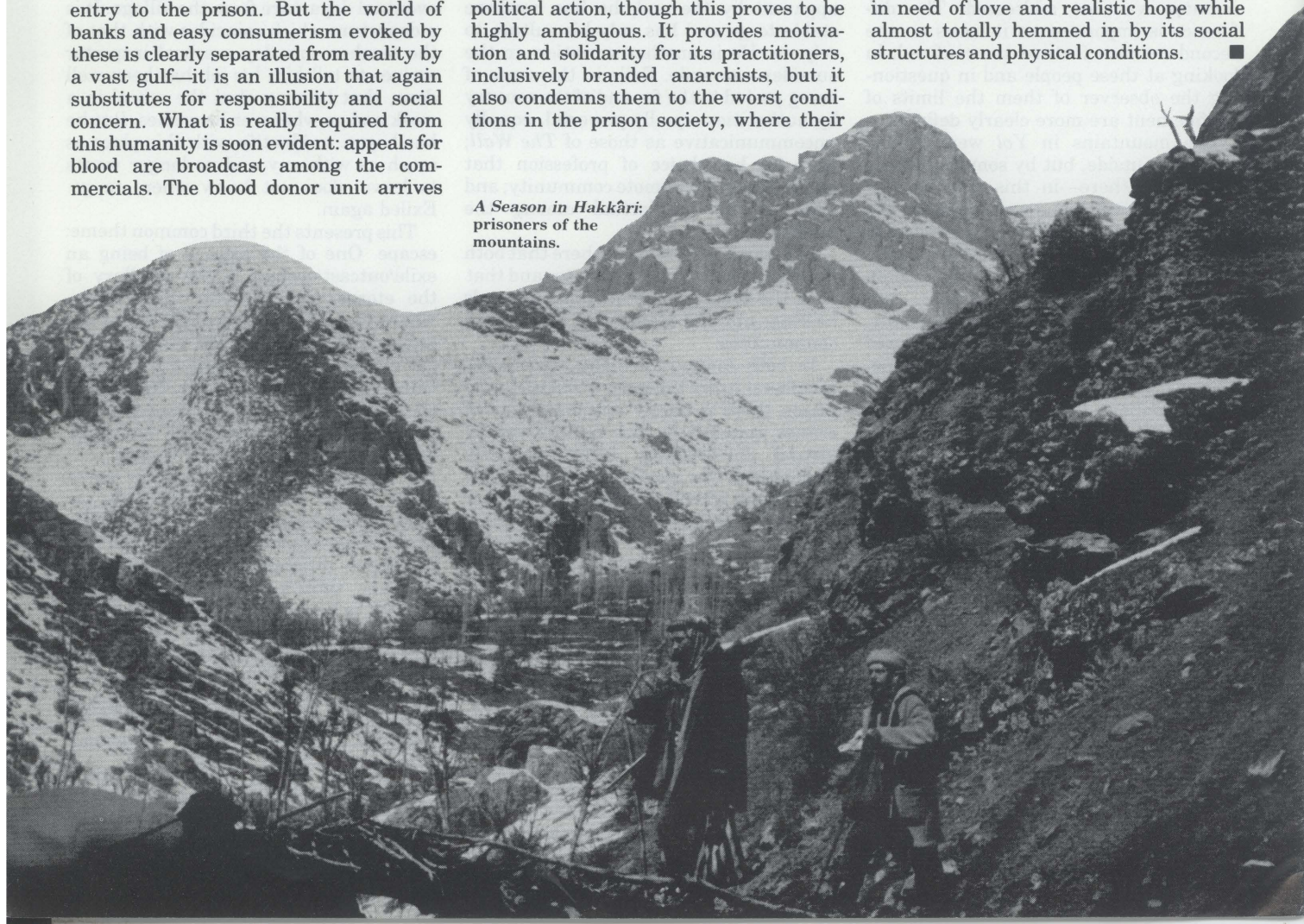
Nevertheless, the films do offer the exile and orphan minute glimmers of hope beyond escape to another prison with TV or football. One of these is political action, though this proves to be highly ambiguous. It provides motivation and solidarity for its practitioners, inclusively branded anarchists, but it also condemns them to the worst conditions in the prison society, where their

only activity is sloganising and eventually rioting. The only gain is a beating and transfer, as for the boys.

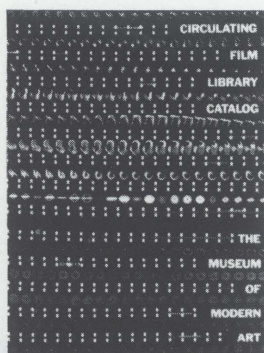
The other course is education. This is offered in *The Wall* through the daughter of the condemned lovers who, having been born in prison, has now reached schooling age. She is escorted in and out of the gates amid much joy on her part and much clapping and flower-giving by the prisoners. ‘Don’t be like us,’ says her father. ‘We’re finished.’ And so passes on the burden of hope to the new generation. The girl at least receives love where the boys receive none. The further stages of education, as presented through the teacher in *Hakkâri*, are not so unambiguous. As has been seen, it results in his being an exile and an outsider, but it does offer him an intellectual world which becomes a home of sorts in his loneliness. In the end he does take a photo of the villagers, and through this link one might suggest that the act of film-making is proposed as an analogous means of partial escape. It offers the image of confinement within a particular community, though at the same time that of an inevitable distancing through analysis, cutting and editing.

Both films show a strong awareness of limitation at the expense of freedom, freedom itself being an extreme limitation, if not an impossibility, because it is conceived as a virtual void. Both are pessimistic, one nihilistic but for the forlorn desire for revolution, and in spite of the difference between the agitated and the contemplative approach, both show dimensions of a society desperately in need of love and realistic hope while almost totally hemmed in by its social structures and physical conditions. ■

A Season in Hakkâri:
prisoners of the
mountains.



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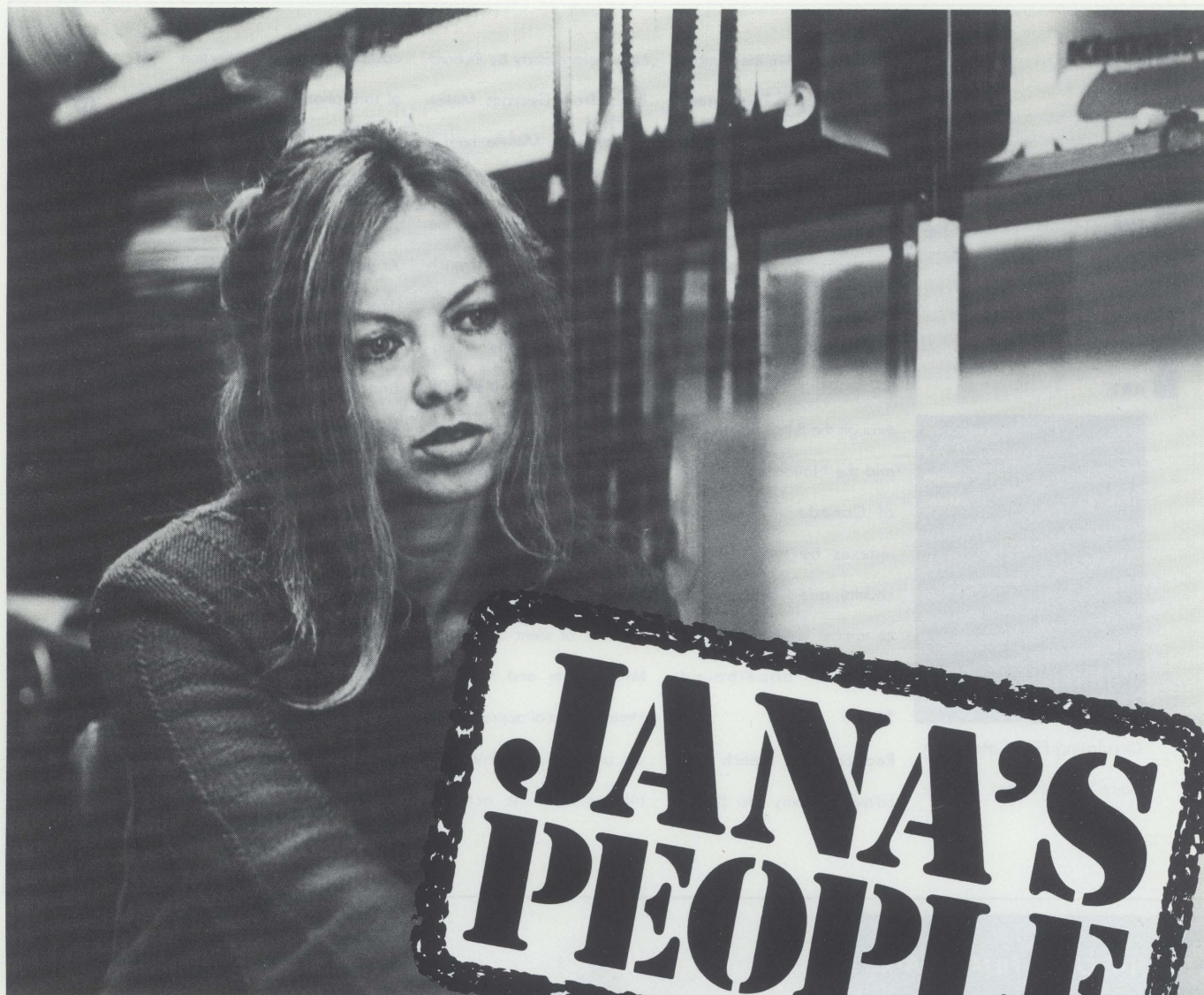
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JANA'S PEOPLE

JANA BOKOVA was born in Prague in 1946. She studied Art History at Charles University, specialising in Surrealism. Coincidentally abroad when the Russians invaded Czechoslovakia, she stayed on in France for a further two years finishing her studies at the Sorbonne. In 1970 and 71 she was in America, travelling and photographing (some of her work has appeared in *Rolling Stone*). In 1972, she returned to Europe and enrolled at the National Film School. Graduating in 1975, she has subsequently worked mainly for television.

A Cette Minute National Film School, 1972
Déjà Vu NFS, 1973
Jokey NFS, 1974 (shown on Scottish television)
Militia Battlefield NFS, 1975 (theatrical distribution in France)
Just One More War ATV, 1977 (profile of photographer Don McCullin)
Marevna and Marika Omnibus, BBC, 1977
Love Is Like a Violin Arts Council of Great Britain, 1977
Rent Boys LWT, 1978
Living Room Omnibus, 1978
I Look Like This Granada TV, 1979
Blue Moon BBC, 1980
Quinn Running Omnibus, 1980
Dallas—The Big Store Omnibus, 1981
Sunset People Arena, BBC, 1984
Hôtel du Paradis Feature film starring Juliet Berto, Anglo-French co-production (Channel 4/Gaumont), begins shooting summer 1984

Mark Le Fanu

The experience of modern civilisation is the experience of city life. Its disjointed, mechanical, anonymous quality has been vigorously reported. It is something everyone knows about, whether they live in cities or not. If city-living has its desolation, it also has its poetry and eroticism. Years ago in the nineteenth century these qualities were captured in literature by great writers like Dickens and Baudelaire. Now perhaps they have moved to a more visual register. Painting for a long interregnum gave city-dwelling its approximate mirror; but it was the invention of cinema that first brought accurately into modern art the veritable experience of transience. The key dates attach to the late nineteenth century. On the one hand there are the Impressionists, with their city squares at rush hour (Pissarro: 'Place du Théâtre Français', 1898) and their penumbral, smoke-filtered railway stations (Monet: 'Gare St Lazare', 1877). On the other hand there are the Lumière Brothers, and another railway station—La Ciotat—

only this time the engine is moving and the crowds are shifting, momentarily, to reveal for a second (in Eric Rhode's words in his *History of the Cinema*) 'the hauntingly beautiful figure in a wide-brimmed hat.' Who was she? We shall never know. But the fact that, existing then, she can be wondered at now—that at that particular moment she passed into the camera's line of sight—reveals a new, important note to the modern sensibility which won't henceforth be easily disregarded.

It didn't of course spell the end of painting, which went on in the period of modernism to enjoy an heroic Indian summer. But this was with different goals, and under the pressure of different obsessions. Whatever painting looked at now, it is safe to say it wasn't the city.

The contemporary painters of our cities are film-makers. The successors of Pissarro, Manet and Baudelaire bear names like Godard, Scorsese or Wenders. *Taxi Driver*, *Mean Streets*, *Alphaville*, *The American Friend* reveal whichever truths they do about the city through the medium of a fictional narrative. They spill over—why we admire them—with a documentary fullness. Yet one can imagine other artists for whom this documentary background becomes the very focus of the interest. The films of Jana Bokova seem to take their origin in the most pervasive form of curiosity, the desire to pierce the mask of blankness and unconcern and enter momentarily into the life of the passer-by in the street. The experience of the crowd, to the *flâneur* and poet, is an experience of mystery and love. In *A Cette Minute* (1972), an early short, Bokova repeats the experiment of the Lumière Brothers by stationing her camera at the exit of a Métro, and watching the disembarking passengers. Some glance at the camera, some don't. The viewer's willingness to engage with the spectacle—to barter boredom for minor epiphanies—depends on the extent to which the spectre of the crowd is, as we say, 'endlessly' fascinating. In Paris this is seldom a problem. And perhaps, anywhere, the passivity of the onlooker in the presence of a crowd is the promise of cinema itself—its invitation to reverie and daydream.

Living Room (1978) takes this all a bit further. There can't be many people who haven't while walking through a city been struck by the features of a particular room glimpsed through a window, and wondered idly who lived there. The rooms that we inhabit are at one and the same time fortresses of our privacy and exclusiveness, but also (pre-eminently) the medium through which we announce ourselves publicly: the medium in which are laid bare our tastes, our passions, our recreations and, finally, our character.

Bokova's film speaks first of all—and finely, humanistically—of the variety of life-styles that exist in our homogenising culture. The home, by definition, is the resort of freedom, the one place on earth where we can indulge in our private eccentricities (without, in most cases, thinking that they are eccentricities).



Don McCullin in *Just One More War*.

Living Room in this sense, like all Bokova's films, has the happiness of its delicate pluralism. One woman, of charming gentleness, her dress matching the chintz of her wallpaper, keeps her room as a sort of shrine to her dead husband, a civil servant whose connection with Africa is reflected in a clutter of memorabilia and statues. Another woman is a painter's model, living in a room that with its huge ornate nudes does its best to imitate the grandeur and decadence of the Belle Époque. Elsewhere, one of those typically reserved professional Englishmen lives with his sculptress wife in acres of space and quietness in the sanctuary of a converted chapel. Each in their way demonstrates an attachment to living space, a creativity about using it, that is human and touching.

This happiness, so important in Bokova's films, is mixed up with a deeper anxiety. Neither the bustling cheerfulness nor the polite candour of her subjects' discourse can disguise the fact that such rooms are, exactly, a 'front'. They represent, precisely, the side of their owners' character that has been chosen to show off to the camera. Is it in any sense the truth? Are there truths—other than appearances? What lies 'behind' the façade? We leave the matter delicately balanced; for, as we have surmised, the subject of her films is a sort of gentle probing of these mysteries.

Modern society is full of façades—the armour put on to cushion people from its unaccountable bruises. But there is also another kind of mask, the social mask, the mask of beauty, put on to attract out of the anonymous crowd the special partner everyone dreams of to accompany them on the journey through life. *I Look Like This* (1979) takes as its subject a video dating agency, one of those weird, slightly fly-by-night institutions that enjoyed a brief vogue in the 70s. Here, in pleasant and informal surroundings, a taped film of the client answering questions about himself is relayed to selected paying customers.

The awkward, strained and ingratiating postures of the participants in front of the video, coupled with the banality of the questions, might be expected to give rise only to embarrassment. But Bokova's behaviourism is not really in the service of satire. Her interest in masks—and her joy in their variety—is accompanied by the conviction that in the end there is something there—a human soul, to be coaxed out and cultivated.

Again and again one is amazed not so much at the eccentricity of her characters, as at their sincerity, tenderness and bravery. How finely and unself-consciously they talk in the presence of the film crew. Here for instance, behind the scenes, in the privacy of their rented apartment, two handsome young Indian girls toss back and forward to each other the chance that they could—just—find a husband (a husband not chosen by their parents). A Yugoslavian woman, once happily married, now widowed (or perhaps she has been deserted?), still attractive, at any event, and full of life, wishes that she didn't have to rely all day, for the sound of the human voice, on the company of the 'wretched radio'. Elsewhere an engaging street vendor—his son a Boy Scout—seeks a replacement for a wife who had left him nine years ago. Well, we leave the film believing they are not likely to find their desires. *I Look Like This* invokes a restrained pessimism in the midst of its forlorn tenderness. The pairings which we see are all subtly (almost racially) awry.

The combination one encounters in Bokova's films, of a personal liberalism operating in a structure at once thoughtful and sceptical, is reminiscent of another major contemporary documentarist, Frederick Wiseman. It is possible to think that Wiseman's films are more 'forensic' than Bokova's—their primary focus being towards the anatomising of specified institutions (the police, the law courts, the army, or whatever). His qualities are 'masculine' and intellectual. Yet the slightly artificial distinction here between 'masculine' and 'feminine' intellect serves a purpose if it allows us to note that, while there are things that Wiseman will always be supremely good at, there are other areas of investigation—areas of sympathy—that Bokova has now made her own.

Her sympathy towards women shouldn't be surprising; after all, she is a 'woman artist'. *Blue Moon* (1980) is an essay for BBC Television on the closing performance of the Concert Mayol in Paris. Concert Mayol was one of the last outposts of artisan burlesque, the small-scale strip show which, despite slender means, had had applied to it a modicum of artistic taste. The women caught, on stage and in the dressing-room, by Bokova's camera have an old-fashioned plumpness and stolidity reminiscent of the photographs of Brassai. And with their plumpness subsists, in interview, what can only be called an accommodating niceness. They belong anachronistically to an era before their profession was considered 'exploitative'. Genuinely part of the theatre—not, of

course of its grand mainstream, but of an honourable rivulet and backwater—they contemplate their professional demise with a philosophic calmness, and a human warmth worthy of Renoir.

Losers and failures predominate, it is said, in Bokova's films; except that—precisely—it all depends on what you mean by a failure. Marika, in *Marevna and Marika* (1977), is the daughter of the Mexican socialist painter Diego Rivera; now somewhat removed from the centre of things; sharing, in fact, in straitened circumstances, a garden house in Ealing as companion to her ageing Russian mother (also a painter). Evidently in her youth—we see it from photographs—she was strikingly beautiful and sought after. Wealth must have beckoned, and the lure of a 'sensible' marriage. The fine taut skin and elegant bone structure have given way, when Bokova meets her, to a generous blowsy amplitude. For recreation she performs a satirical cabaret in small clubs to a clientèle that, knowing nothing of the noble tradition of the chanteuse, treats her (since she sends herself up) as a joke and embarrassment.

'Failure' in one sense, then; but, as the texture of the film makes clear, by any true criterion, an inadequate judgment. Wonderful scenes show her and her mother together, the latter active and still painting over the age of 80, surrounded by bone-gnawing dogs and scattered memorabilia—sculptures, sketches, photograph albums from the heroic epoch of modernism; so that it becomes incomparably clear to the viewer why in the last resort a truly bohemian existence (no matter how indigent) is preferable to status and riches. Marika's fatness is thus at the same time her freedom; to use an old-fashioned term: her liberation from the wheel of the passions.

Marevna and Marika, along with *Blue Moon*, belongs to a trilogy about women in performance that was inaugurated, soon after film school, by a movie called *Militia Battlefield* (1975). The title of the film refers to another extraordinary performance artist, an immense feisty blues singer, of uncertain talent but unmistakable energy and character. (*Militia* is sister-under-the-skin to Marika on the one hand, and to Mama Sarah, of *Sunset People*, on the other. Why is obesity so attractive to Bokova? It is as if all these women, who were originally pretty, have plumbed the depths of vanity, and returned. They know about its illusory dialectics. All have privately made a journey of self-discovery, whose experience now counts as a wisdom.)

But the title of *Militia Battlefield* fails to tell the whole story; the movie isn't so much about its eponymous heroine as about the relationship of two secondary characters, a camp semi-alcoholic pianist from Oklahoma calling himself Sir Lawrence and his companion, Ernestine. Verbal description can't hope to do justice to the peculiarity of this latter personage. For a start, she is twice as old as her husband (for the couple 'get married'



Anthony Quinn in *Quinn Running*.

during the course of the movie's shooting). When we first see her she is toothless and resembles an ageing grandmother. In one of the film's amazing passages, however, she agrees to don her false teeth; at which moment she is transformed as if by magic into an attractive middle-aged woman, impressive in her charm and volubility.

It emerges by stages (behind-the-scenes conversations, interviews with friends) that years ago she had lost her only son. At first she was desolate and unconsolable. Later, believing in reincarnation, she came to think that his soul had taken up residence in the body of an American actor, Pete Duel. He too, unfortunately, is no longer in the land of the living. The pianist Sir Lawrence was met one day, probably drunk, coming out of the Ladies in a restaurant. The audience of the film won't have spent a moment in his company without seeing that by any conceivable test he is an immeasurably impossible companion. Ernestine however—such is the power and peculiarity of the human heart—takes one look at him and (discovering her son's spitting image) falls head over heels in love. The film's power to touch us, in sum, lies in Bokova's ability to extract from camp or extravagant behaviour the veritable contours of passion. For in the end, surely, these secret passions are what we live for. The extraordinary 'maternal' loyalty demonstrated here (with its reverse, the filial loyalty of *Marevna and Marika*) is a subject rarely treated by art—at least, rarely as tenderly or as truthfully as in these delicate studies for television.

Jana Bokova's films are not entirely given over to women (in this sense, as in others, I think it would be wrong to consider her as predominantly a feminist film-maker). Two films in particular—*Quinn Running* (1980) and *Dallas—The Big Store* (1981)—cast a wry look at masculine ambition. Quinn is the actor Anthony Quinn, interviewed jogging in

Central Park: also in two separate domiciles—a large apartment recently purchased in New York (so recently that the camera crew keep tripping over the packing cases); and a more settled residence outside Rome, where, in a specially equipped studio, he follows his hobby of sculpting. Opposing currents of feeling are sufficiently present in the film to make it ambivalent and interesting. There is a sort of admiration for the self-made man, the autodidact and connoisseur (Quinn is proud of his collection of paintings); an actor-prince, in short, who lives his life largely and generously. On the other hand there is a feeling, hinted at in the title, that his energy is restless and unhappy. The film plays around, as always, at the different levels at which people give themselves over as performers, noting with a sort of restrained irony that an actor is never so much an actor as when attempting (for instance, for the benefit of a camera crew) to be serious, intimate and truthful.

Quinn Running is for me the one film of Bokova's that halts just short of revelation. Wondering why this should be so, I am led to certain reflections—held off from so far—about the difference between cinema and television. Bokova is a cinema artist by preference working, of necessity, within the constraints of the smaller, less prestigious medium. Thus it is unlikely, sometimes, that her art won't fall between the two stools. Mention Bokova's name, as I have done once or twice, in admiration, to television producers, and one will get the immediate response: 'Of course her films are good. That's because her budgets are so large!' At which they will go on to add: 'With the money allocated to one of her films I would be expected to bring in a series.' The truth is, of course, that quality is necessarily expensive. It may be, paradoxically, the fault of *Quinn Running* that not enough money has been spent on it. The comparable power that Wim Wenders, for example, is able



Stanley Marcus in *Dallas—The Big Store*.

to achieve with *Lightning Over Water* (his portrait of the dying Nicholas Ray) belongs, by this token, uniquely to cinema. He has the time and the money to accomplish it. The battle—for time, space, resources—has to be fought each round anew.*

Meanwhile there is *Dallas—The Big Store* (1981), the emporium being none other than the famous Neiman-Marcus in Texas, still at the time of filming under the paternalist guidance of its founder, a Jewish immigrant of the old school, Stanley Marcus. The film divides between an interest in Marcus like the previous film's interest in Quinn (that is to say: the portrait of a self-made masculine spirit); and interest in the store itself, or rather, in the assorted flora and fauna who go to make up its custom.

From the point of view of a European audience it is easy enough to imagine why the spectre of American commercialism, unbridled, as it is in *Dallas*, to an unprecedented degree (and with corresponding opportunities for vulgarity), should encourage the artist to satire. Such at any event appears to be the opinion of Paul Taylor, who wrote in *Primetime* (Autumn 1981): 'That *Dallas—The Big Store* was a project which Jana Bokova approached with preconceptions is immediately evident. This group portrait of the owners, employees and big-spending customers of the exclusive Neiman-Marcus emporium delivers nothing less than a "documentary" equivalent of the soap-opera format which the title conjures up. Formally posing her subjects alongside expensive artefacts or in front of mirrors, Bokova constructs a virtual satire on the cornerstones of the American Dream—health, wealth and the pursuit of happiness sequentially hymned, on cue, *ad nauseam*.'

*Note on reseeing the film: It stands up better than I thought. The colour photography, by John Hooper, is fine and cinematic. I also expect I am guilty of playing down its humour.

To one viewer at least this is not really the flavour of the movie. The film seems to me simply another of those subtle explorations of Bokova's that take as their starting point the almost impenetrable mystery, that in order to exist at all in the world, we must first give ourselves out as appearances. The very existence of clothing at all bespeaks the presence of a fantasy that literally no single person escapes from. Naturally, the fantasies available to clients of Neiman-Marcus are more opulent and variegated than the fantasies available to most people; but the difference of degree doesn't alter the fact that the focus of the film's meditation is, at bottom, a profoundly universal phenomenon. (Thus, as we have said before, only in the most indirect sense is Bokova a 'political' artist. The point of her films—as surely the point of Wiseman's—is not so much to protest as to record. Judgment, at the level at which any art worth the name begins to 'take', is inevitably detached and Olympian. Such observations are not welcome in certain quarters. But they are true in proportion to their obduracy.)†

Dallas—The Big Store, then, brings back a comparison with Frederick Wiseman, who, coincidentally, in 1983, brought out his own documentary about Neiman-Marcus, *The Store*. His interest, to be expected, is rather more than Bokova's in the organisation and logistics of the enterprise. He aims to capture the character and psychology not so much of the customers as of the people in the background—cutters, buyers, marketing managers—who make the place prosperous and successful.

In fact, however, the disinterested observer would stress similarities rather than differences between the filmmakers. For example (the single most important item): voice-over commentary in their films is altogether dispensed

†Cf. this statement by Fellini in a recent interview: 'I have never made a film against anything. . . ' (*Positif*, October 1983).

with. Everything is handed over to the alertness and attentiveness of the viewer. The rhythm of the films' editing, with their long slow arcs, their pauses and silences and ellipses, brings into such documentaries, what is usually so lacking, the very pressure of human thought itself. (Behind this lies a generosity towards the power of the Unconscious. It is interesting that both Bokova and Wiseman speak of the editing process as a period of 'dreaming' the film into coherence.) Bokova's and Wiseman's documentaries place themselves at the furthest possible point from the positivism of the average half-hour television transmission. Truth, for these intelligent watchers, is never statistical: it is personal, poetic and worked for.

Sunset People (1984), Bokova's most recent documentary, takes as its subject matter assorted characters who hang out on or within striking distance of the famous Los Angeles boulevard. By most of the criteria just mentioned, it is her most 'Wisemanesque' movie so far. Long, but never boring (it lasts over two hours, and could have lasted longer) there is a certainty about its rhythms and cadences, a sort of stateliness and inevitability about its progress, that marks it out, to this viewer, as a masterpiece.

All true works of art are works of intellect, that is to say, of structural wholeness. Wholeness is founded on rhythm. Rhythm in *Sunset People* is, first, musical (as so often in cinema: the one pre-eminent advantage it seems to hold over theatre), the singing of the Hawaiian cabaret artiste Mama Sarah that opens the film and, ever so tenderly, closes it. (But there is also much musical interlude.) On top of this there is the spacing of the interviews, a gradual focusing down of material whereby—starting off with a large cast of characters—the film comes eventually to concentrate on a mere handful, and two in particular, Tom Castronova and Mario Roccyyzo, whose destiny turns out to be the film's secret content. (Was Bokova to know this in advance? One hardly thinks so. One has to have an idea of the direction in which the film is going, but then the courage to let chance play its part.)

The film is exceptionally thoughtful (reflecting, as it should, a project of a year and a half's duration). In classical drama, we are told by Aristotle, the aim of the artist is to produce a turning, or *peripeteia*. This is perhaps what T. S. Eliot is referring to when in his discussions of Jacobean drama he speaks of moments in a play that exist in a 'heightened realm', a superior reality, so that persons, objects, places take on a transcendent significance. Now in the twentieth century, as the theatre declines, it becomes increasingly an attribute of cinema. Thus the mode of revelation among the great works of Mizoguchi, Dreyer or Renoir is, as we say, the epiphany.

Tom Castronova and Mario Roccyyzo, in *Sunset People*, are character actors in minor television series, refugees of long

standing from the East Coast, first glimpsed at breakfast time at the counter of Schwab's café on the Boulevard. Castronova is a handsome, witty man, something of a fixer, at home with the passing clientele, a poet, a jester; equally obviously, in some sense, insolvent. The less handsome Mario is perhaps more sensitive and intelligent, but essentially as feckless and bohemian.

With many intervals and absences, during which the camera tours other locations and meets other people, the film slowly comes round to concentrating its gaze on this couple (they are friends incidentally, rather than lovers). We catch sight of them in the street, and in the background of other people's conversations. Finally we encounter them ourselves in a session at an afternoon drinking bar. The scene that unfolds is, for me, one of the great revelatory scenes in contemporary cinema. Nothing in Altman or Cassavetes (paying appropriate tribute to the finest) is as profound or touching as the magnificent documentary dialogue that emerges as afternoon curves into evening. There will never, for these part-time actors, be any role equal to this one. The wit, the pride, the dignity of their bearing, the spontaneity of their lyric effusions, establish Tom and Mario not, finally, as failures; but as serious men who have measured existence, who have stood for a moment on the abyss, and felt the cold shiver of mortality. ■



Mama Sarah in *Sunset People*.

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Afternoon at Peredelkino

by N.M.Lary

I was walking through fields and woods towards Peredelkino. I was going to see Shklovsky. The suburban train from Moscow had ended one station too soon, and then someone had put me on the wrong bus and I was having to walk. An old woman warned me, 'It's a long way,' before pointing out the path. In the country Shklovsky had no phone. He was not expecting me. Maybe it was wrong to go and just knock on his door. Visitors who went through official channels were discouraged: Shklovsky was old; he had lost his wife; he had had a bad accident; he was unwell. Would it be worthwhile?

At home media people had dismissed the notion that Shklovsky at 90 deserved attention. A founding father of Formalism, who had raised the study of literature to the level of theory; a script-writer and film editor in the kino-factory in the great days of Soviet film; a friend to Mayakovsky and the young Roman Jakobson and to Eisenstein; a survivor; a respected cousin of the structuralists; one of the great writers of the century—all this was not significant now. In any event I was going. It was a sunny late-summer morning; somewhere far away a Korean jet had been shot down and people had died, but in Moscow that did not matter yet. This might be one of Shklovsky's good days: he would receive me; he might be pleased that I had come from abroad, from Canada, that I was proposing to study his work as script-writer and film theorist, editor and critic. Everything today, with all the digressions, even the wrong train and bus and the long, long walk, was part of one design.

In Peredelkino, this 'Place Beyond the Bound', I went to the 'Writers' Settlement'. No, the mysteriously named 'Green Deadend' where Shklovsky now lived was not there. Several people asked me whom I wanted, and seemed to give their approval when I said Shklovsky (none of the rough 'What do you want here?' that often greeted me in Moscow). Apparently the Green Deadend was back on the other side of this wide-reaching place, near the chapel and estate of the Patriarch of All Russias. By chance a taxi came along. The Green Deadend—ah yes, that was the establishment dreamed

up by a wild character—Moroz or maybe Morozov—just a few years before, encircled by a high stone wall crazily winding in and out among the birch trees, within which there was a huge curving swimming pool next to a bar where gypsies danced and sang. This adventurer might have escaped out of the pages of Bulgakov. He had been found out, and his place claimed by the Union of Writers; in a new, roughly finished block of houses in the garden lived Shklovsky.

A young man opens the door. 'I have come to find out if Viktor Borisovich will receive me. You see, I am studying his work.' The man's eyes light up: I am the hoped-for guest on this Saturday. His name is Nikita, the same as mine; we smile at each other. I have turned up at just the right time. 'He will certainly see you.' Nikita is his grandson, a doctor. Shklovsky has been cared for by his daughter and her son since the death of his wife two years ago.

As I wait alone in the study, another doubt surfaces. The great principle of Shklovsky's artistic theory and practice was to make the world 'strange', so that we might perceive it and did not just 'recognise' it, did not just see the same familiar things. What will I see? I am one more foreigner, on the pilgrimage to Peredelkino, to see a famous Russian writer. Fortunately two more Saturday visitors intervene: the granddaughter of Eikhenbaum, Shklovsky's old friend from the early days of Formalism, and a friend of hers from Leningrad, who wants to sketch Shklovsky. In the passageway there is a shuffling of feet; Shklovsky enters. In recent pictures he looked heavy and fleshy like Edmund Wilson in old age. Now he is lean once again, even if he is frail, so that the features of the young Shklovsky fleetingly emerge as he sits and talks. He has just returned from a holiday in the South with Nikita. Permission to go was difficult to obtain: 'What if something happens to you?' 'Well, so what if I do die?' 'Ah, we'd be held accountable!' Shklovsky is magnanimously indignant.

Shklovsky likes to hold forth. The topic for the day turns out to be Don Quixote. Seven years ago, when I spoke to

The following extracts from the writings of Viktor Shklovsky, which are here translated for the first time into English by Richard Taylor, are taken from the forthcoming book *The Film Factory: Russian and Soviet Cinema in Documents*, to be published by Routledge, editors Ian Christie and Richard Taylor.

Beware of Music

Subterranean 'spirits'

In the old navy they called the mechanics who were to be found in the bowels of the ship, near the engines, 'spirits'. People had no respect for these 'spirits' and spoke ironically about them. The 'spirits' had no tradition and there was no reference to them in the history of the fleet, under steam or sail.

In contemporary cinema script-writers play the part of 'spirits', with no mention and no large letters on the posters, working on the non-prestigious task of preparing the mechanisms of the film and servicing these mechanisms.

The inhabitants of the upper deck do not nourish the spirits with either comradely friendship or gratitude. Now and then they even propose doing away with the spirits as nobody wants to clamber down to them. They suppose that the steamer will travel of its own accord.

Seventy-five per cent

Two years ago Eisenstein, examining one script, announced that a Babel short story provided 75 per cent of what was needed for a script and that same Babel's script provided only 25 to 30 per cent—in the script version of the piece the qualities that the director requires are reduced.

Eisenstein considered that the task of the script is to influence the director, to put him into a creative mood. Eisenstein wrote his own scripts and the programme that he proposed lay at the basis of the film *October*.

October is a film without a script, it is pure influence. This has turned the film into a catalogue of inventions that are distributed in an unknown order, neither chronological nor alphabetical.

Two years after Eisenstein, Vsevolod Pudovkin made the same discovery. Pudovkin thinks that a script is a half-finished product or the raw material, not for the film but for something else which, it seems, is the script. Pudovkin suggests that we should not perceive in images nor record in words what the film should depict but produce short, apparently somersaulting and suddenly stopping, erupting and stretching

intertitles that knock the director out of his usual mood.

According to Pudovkin, the author of a script must communicate to the director the rhythm of the film but he must not attempt to write the director a montage shooting plan. Pudovkin demonstrates all this in an excerpt from Rzheshhevsky's script.

Pudovkin's position sins against production . . . All right, we'll have jumping and stopping titles and no montage shooting plan. But we need a montage plan in order to shoot. Consequently, between the montage lists of the director and the somersaulting titles there must be some kind of point which will in any case contain an order of scenes and their exact content. Then a script will emerge. Hence Pudovkin, instead of resolving the problem of what a script should be, is resolving another, less pressing problem of who should write the script and he decides that the director should do it.

Rank ingratitude

Not every director knows how to create scenes. Pudovkin himself is a scriptwriter who has written scripts, though not for himself, and it is therefore possible that he can write a script. But it is strange that Pudovkin rejects his own work in the past because the two films that brought him fame—*The Mother* and *The End of St Petersburg*—were shot according to well devised montage scripts by Zarkhi.

It is my conviction that the script for *Storm Over Asia* is much more interesting than the film that we have seen. In the script there were no dubious (from the point of view of taste) allegories or metaphors, no 'fountains of oratory' or 'trees falling when the leader dies'. But while in the script there was little that was exotic, there was a certain irony at the expense of the exotic.

The end of *Storm Over Asia* with the whirlwind is realistic theatrically and realistic emotionally but it is non-specific and therefore bad. It is bad because there is no 'spirit' in it, no calculation and no closure. A miracle: the elements depersonalise man . . .

Rzheshhevsky, like Pudovkin, is a talented man. But in the excitement of the search for a rhythmical cinema we must not forget the semantic side of cinema, its plot-semantic baggage.

For the time being rhythmical musical cinema has taken a very bad path, the path of allegory, of the misuse of non-aesthetic constants, of direct appeal to the physiology of the audience and its emotional mood. This path is at the same time both scholastic and primitively emotional.

Sovetskii ekran, 1 January 1929

Shklovsky in his apartment in Moscow, he was working on a film script about Cervantes' character. The script has long been finished; Shklovsky is anxious to see it made into a film. But since his work with Lev Kuleshov on *By the Law* (set in an imaginary Yukon) and with Avram Room on *Bed and Sofa* (of interest to latter-day feminists) in the 20s, he has had little luck with directors; this film too is bogged down in difficulties. As he explains his latest discoveries about Don Quixote, he says challengingly, 'Nobody knows how to read. You don't know how to read.' I practise listening. Shklovsky speaks almost aphoristically: 'The world is known through art.' 'Man learns to be in a classic' (enigmatic this). 'A good script constantly grows.' 'A film should be loved because it has been born.' The Shklovsky created by theorists in English and French is convoluted and abstruse; the Shklovsky who is speaking to me is direct; organic metaphors are very much on his mind today.

We all go outside to have tea on the terrace. Shklovsky wants us to take wine too. He does not drink any himself; he has been born drunk he says. We raise our glasses and Eikhenbaum's granddaughter kisses him. She has known him all her life, which is a little more than a third of his ninety years. I remember him speaking to me seven years ago about his strange sense of having outlived almost his whole generation; he recalled how on the day Anna Akhmatova died, he went out and ran into one old friend; and though Shklovsky had long been out of touch with Akhmatova, on this occasion the two men drowned their sorrow in drink. And he spoke too of the strange new life beginning for him in his relations with younger generations. Since that time, he has lost his second wife; he is even more alone in his generation. But he is deeply appreciative of and loving with his grandson, and tolerant of us. It is a beautiful day—each of us says so. A wonderful vast anticyclone hangs over Moscow, trapping the warm summer air and keeping away dark thoughts.

Earlier, in the study, I wanted to ask Shklovsky some questions. They were an interruption. He was writing aloud, giving voice and shape to his thoughts. I learned to wait. Over tea he returns to his notion that art anticipates and divines life. Fifty odd years ago, in his script for a film about Dostoevsky, *House of the Dead* (one of the first Soviet sound films), he assumed that Dostoevsky at the time of his death was in touch with revolutionaries from the People's Will. Recent evidence has confirmed his hypothesis. I tell him that, none the less, Dostoevsky's very last act, on his deathbed, was to dictate a letter to a member of the highly religious, official circles, my great-great-grandmother.

Using Shklovsky's own terms, I argue, with a different emphasis, that Dostoevsky's 'doubts' and his debates 'for and against' continued to the very end. Seven years ago, when Shklovsky asked me about my Russian origins, I mentioned this side of the family. Shklovsky said nothing; revolutionaries, writers and

intellectuals were his interest. Afterwards I was sorry that I had not mentioned my grandfather's side, which included a writer whose ambition was to be the Russian Balzac. This time I make certain to bring him in when I am asked to give an account of myself. Shklovsky says, 'He is a writer.' From Shklovsky this is a distinction amounting to praise. Everyone is pleased. The day must remain unclouded.

Shklovsky tells a story indicating Tolstoy's esteem for this Russian Balzac. And his talk passes to Tolstoy's escape and death. Shklovsky sees it as a form of suicide, a solution to an impossible situation at home. He recalls his own trip as a youth to Yasnaya Polyana to see Tolstoy (with a shock I realise how far back his memory reaches). He was admitted into the house and given a drink. When he protested that he did not want one, the servant replied that his orders were to serve callers a drink when things were quiet in the household, but to send them on in when things were disturbed.

Shklovsky also reminisces about his journeys in the post-revolutionary years in the remote regions near China, in which time had almost stopped. The material and inspiration for *Turksib* (the documentary classic) was gathered there. The visitor from Leningrad asks a big question. One of Shklovsky's great aphorisms was 'Books write themselves'. Well then, what does creation mean for Shklovsky? Shklovsky pauses briefly and declares: 'I am married; I am the husband of my muse. She gives me trouble and treats me roughly, yet knows that every day I shall be at my desk working.'

Nikita insists that his grandfather go for a walk; the two of them will accompany the rest of us to the station. In the fields and gardens, swiftly working, sundarkened men are gathering in the harvest. Women in scarves load vegetables on to carts. We stop at a bend in the road and look out over the expanse of fields belonging to the Patriarch of All Russias. The land falls away and rises again. The trees are touched with yellow and red. Behind us the evening bells are ringing. We have a folding chair with us; Shklovsky sits in it. We stand around. In turn each of us intones 'What a fine day'. It is a scene out of Chekhov. I must find out what Shklovsky thinks about him if I come again; Shklovsky has scarcely written about him. The moment is filled with possibility. They might all wait for me outside the cemetery while I go and see Pasternak's tomb. Or they might take me as far as the church if I want to look in.

We walk on, and stop again at a widening of the road and gather round Shklovsky. A car stops; the driver is a family friend; she is amused by this social gathering in the roadway. In his chair Shklovsky raises his arms with delight: 'Hurrah!' He will not have to walk home. For all of us, it has been a fine day, a celebration of survival, of the word.

The anticyclone breaks up two days later. A wet fall arrives. When I next call on Shklovsky, he is not feeling well. But he



Viktor Shklovsky (seated, centre) with Rodchenko and Mayakovsky in the 1920s.

receives me. For a while, I am afraid we might have the same talk over again, when he begins with *Don Quixote*. Then new variations and a new theme can be heard: *Don Quixote* was a man of the future, a terrorist. And from that Shklovsky is led to speak about the subtext of rebellion in the epigraphs of Pushkin's *Captain's Daughter*. Shklovsky's tiredness shows. He is less determined to develop a train of thought today. It is my opportunity to raise my questions. As I ask them I realise they might not be quite crucial after all.

Seven years ago Shklovsky categorically asserted that *Alexander Nevsky* was Eisenstein's best film, not *Ivan the Terrible*. Then I was too intimidated to ask him his reasons. Now he does not want to elaborate the distinction. Out of curiosity I try a different topic, and ask his opinion of Bulgakov. 'A great man, but I do not like him,' is the answer. I remember that the roots of the dislike are deep, going back to the dispute between modernists and traditionalists. There is no way Shklovsky could take Bulgakov in. During the intervals of silence punctuated by talk I hear Shklovsky's grandson and four-year-old great-granddaughter reading *Le Petit Prince* in French upstairs.

The best things today are some reminiscences and philosophical remarks. He speaks about *OPOYAZ*, the group out of which Russian Formalism came: 'In the *OPOYAZ* anything that was said was

common property.' He recalls in particular the inventiveness of Tynianov, Eikhenbaum and Polivanov ('a charming man,' Shklovsky says with emphasis, perhaps because this brilliant scholar of disappearing and buried languages, who died in prison, an opium addict, is less well remembered). He speaks of the excitement of film-making in the 20s, and remarks that the opportunity for a real, popular, collaborative art existed then, and was lost. 'Afterwards the best films were like people letting their true thoughts slip out.'

Today the future seems short; Shklovsky has the feeling of too much left undone, of books inside him waiting to be 'born' through his eyes (he seems almost to visualise the paragraphs) but which never will emerge. 'Viktor Borisovich,' I protest, 'consider your readers. You must give us time to read your books.' He says not to worry: a book will exist, and when a man reads it he may imagine that he himself wrote it or that someone else did. Who the author is does not matter. A book is like the butterfly in the Chinese philosopher's dream, who might be a real one dreaming of the philosopher. Shklovsky's dream-vision of a world of books does not dispel the shadow of death. 'I do not believe in the resurrection of the dead,' he announces. And then comes a characteristic parenthetical comment from this man who has loved people and loved words: 'Although of course it would be good to walk about there and

The Film Factory

The script should always make use of an interesting location, but this does not always work

The film factory that I worked in was a small brick building on the outskirts of Moscow. During the Moscow floods the water reached the factory; the courtyard and the windows on the lower floor were piled with bricks on cement. They were getting their boats ready in the yards: the overflowing Moscow River was swishing all around.

The Leningrad floods have a much greater effect than the Moscow ones. There the floods are always accompanied by storms. Signboards fly around in the air... In Moscow the flood was more like a flat that has flooded because someone forgot to turn off the bath tap—quiet, calm water. Ice in the water is swift but not serious—as if it is rushing to the bazaar.

When the factory was flooded I immediately suggested making a comedy, *Moscow Under Water*, utilising this unusual setting and the fine sunny days. But in order to make a film like that we had to pass the script through three or four commissions and receive their amendments. In the meantime the water subsided.

That is how the Soviet cinema has been deprived of one film. Everybody was on a salary and the cameramen were sitting there flooded. It was not a particular loss, just an ordinary one.

The film actor in the factory

Directorial improvisation—devising new details, chopping scenes—occupies a large place in the studios. The actor suffers the fate of a thread on the wrong side of the carpet, he walks along the corridor, drinks tea in the canteen and sits all day in his make-up worrying that his make-up will not come off. He pays more for his tea in the canteen than a regular employee, he cannot leave and he does not know what is in the script. But on the screen it is usually precisely the actor's acting that comes across to the audience. It almost always comes across and a particular scene may spoil the whole picture. A cinema film consists of drops. The actor is filmed for one minute of pure time, at most five minutes, and only samples of all this are taken. In the average film he is more a cipher although he has worked for months. Our manpower, which is first rate and works hard and selflessly, should demand that it be treated in the same way as horses, that it be given jobs, food and the right care. At the basis of the alternative attitude lies a failure to understand the role of raw material, a

lack of respect for it and the supposition that you can film what you want and whom you want and not proceed from the real tasks, the real constraints set by raw material and time.

Filming in general

Cinema nature is created in the cutting room: they say that in America the left-over mountains, forests, sunrises and sunsets are later sold off separately. This is not happening here yet although we have already had a request from America to buy the mountains in the Caucasus.

Motalka, Moscow, 1927

The Soviet School of Acting

American cinema is founded on the beauty of the actors, their personal attraction, on the idealisation of man. If we show Soviet and American films side by side we see that Americans are more beautiful. American actors represent the social ideal of certain groups in the population of the USA and for that reason they cannot be replaced by typage because they are the best possible type.

Sovetskii ekran, 20 November 1928

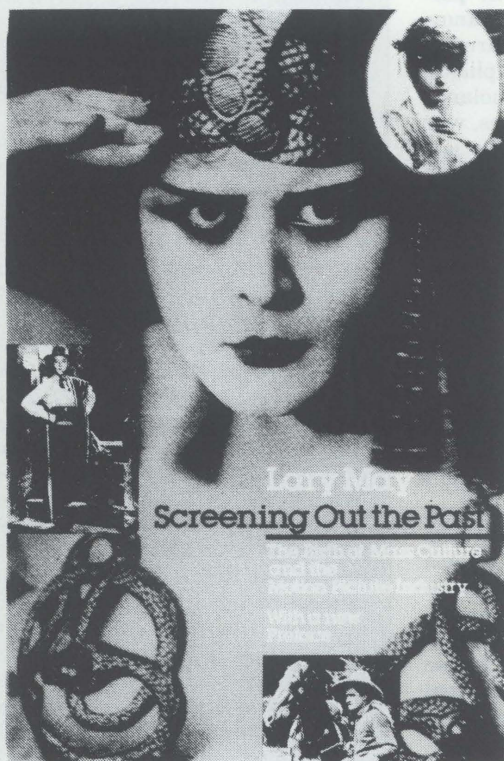
run into people and to converse.' He wants to see the West one more time before dying. He would like to go to Italy, maybe to the conference about his film scripts to be held there next spring.

I see Shklovsky one last time, my last day in Moscow. I bring him a kiss from Khokhlova, Kuleshov's wonderful actress in *By the Law* and *The Extraordinary Adventures of Mr West in the Land of the Bolsheviks*, who at ninety-three, half-blind, still filled with the passion and comedy of life, is busily writing the record of what she witnessed. Shklovsky has been dictating into a tape recorder for two hours; at the same time his secretary has taken notes (later the secretary will collate the variations and perspectives on a theme and edit them). I come in for the last hour of work. When Shklovsky sees a good chain of thoughts forming, he alerts us, 'What's coming is good.' The topic today is not life or death, but travelling, wandering, and displacement as a means of knowledge. Apparently Shklovsky has been speaking about Chekhov (and Don Quixote). This may be my chance to find out about the Chekhovian overtones of my first, magical day in Peredelkino. I challenge him: 'There is no motion in Chekhov's plays.' His answer is better than I deserve, and in it there is something of what I need: 'Perhaps they don't move. But we transfer ourselves into his work. We look.' He goes on to develop a notion of motion and

destruction as the basic principle of art. 'Is parody a form of motion?' I ask, hoping that he will talk about parody in film. But I cannot play with him: he simply answers, 'Yes, it is.' He does speak about film: 'The basic principle of film is that one shot is as if erased by the next one. The result is motion. When we start repeating ourselves, art ceases.'

To find out something about Shklovsky's response to the present, I ask him about Paradzhanov, known abroad for his *Shadows of Our Forgotten Ancestors*, whose *Colour of Pomegranates* I have seen. 'Isn't this painting rather than motion?' I ask. Shklovsky responds with unexpected warmth. Apparently he worked on one of the script versions of this film. 'Paradzhanov destroys the old film art and restores it. He is my comrade. He and I can understand one another.' He speaks about the great difficulties Paradzhanov has endured. Then, finally, perhaps worried by the further implications of today's theme, his notion that art is motion and also destruction, Shklovsky adds: 'Art is not madness. Why does the nightingale sing well? Because the nightingale does just one thing.'

Shklovsky maybe never was a man to interview. He probably always was and will be obsessed with Don Quixote. His unproprietary vision of shared artistic creation and intellectual endeavour is undimmed—still revolutionary. ■



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CHICAGO

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Un Amour de Swann: the Baron de Charlus (Alain Delon).

Alas, poor Swann

Un Amour de Swann/Jill Forbes

'To think that I have wasted years of my life on a woman whom I don't find attractive.' Alas, poor Swann! The connoisseur, the aesthete, the dandy, the man about town who collected women as others collected butterflies, who elevated taste to an art form, how *did* he contrive to marry a not very high-class courtesan by the *nom de guerre* of Odette de Crécy? Everything about Odette was vulgar—from her friends the Verdurin and their extraordinary cronies, to the ostentatious Orientalism of her house. She was uneducated, unamusing and unfaithful, and Swann was obsessed with her. But he hadn't been swept off his feet. His desire for Odette was fed by jealousy and suspicion, and was more by way of an addiction than a grand passion. He was completely conscious of the nature of the disease, but more interested in feeding the habit than in finding the cure.

Fortune has smiled on *Un Amour de Swann* (Artificial Eye) in many respects. The film has a brilliant director (Volker Schlöndorff) who has specialised in literary adaptations; in Sven Nykvist it has one of the best cameramen alive; it has a leading actor who is the hottest property since Robert Redford, and a leading lady who is the hottest since... Gina Lollobrigida. Any one of the supporting cast would have guaranteed box-office receipts. Yet despite these advantages, Schlöndorff's effort must be honoured more in the intention than the achievement. Proust is a rock on which both Losey and Visconti foundered, and the present film has not negotiated the obstacles posed.

Essentially, anyone setting out to film Proust (or a part thereof) has a twofold problem to surmount. Though read perhaps by the few, Proust's novel is a literary monument, just familiar enough

to the many for it to be encircled by a ring of critical protectiveness to ward off marauding film producers. Its 'classic' status compounds the existing difficulties of adapting novels to the screen, while a work that is so exceptionally long can hardly fail to be in some way traduced when it is adapted. This need not matter. Olivier's *Richard III* is arguably more effective on film than ever it would have been in the theatre; creative treason has frequently served the cinema well, and so on. On the other hand, if *Un Amour de Swann* is reduced to its narrative content, it cannot be said to contain anything resembling a strong story line: 'Middle-aged roué meets not-too-attractive ex-prostitute...' What makes the novel so riveting is all the rest; and it is this, rather than an absolute requirement to be faithful to the original, that causes Schlöndorff difficulties.

This could have been the portrait of a decadent society, and the way Schlöndorff has handled the public scenes suggests that this would have been one useful means of filling out the narrative. When at the end of the film the dying Swann, accompanied by his daughter, calls to bid farewell to the Duchesse de Guermantes, she refuses to believe it will be their last meeting. Instead, she berates Swann for not visiting more often while at the same time remarking to the Duc that it would be 'too easy' to receive the daughter just because the father is dying. She then sweeps out to a luncheon appointment, but not before being sent back into the house by her husband to change into shoes that match her dress. A high shot of Swann, lost in the vast cobbled courtyard, almost pleading for comprehension as he looks up towards Oriane while she callously dismisses all but the most

immediate or trivial of concerns, is a poignant comment on the nature of these social relations, while Fanny Ardant's sparkling performance as Oriane explains why Swann devoted so much attention to the Guermantes. A contrasting and parallel cameo is provided by Marie-Christine Barrault as Mme Verdurin, the lady who laughs so loudly she dislocates her jaw. Her physical contortions are the emblem of her lack of social grace, and Swann is, again, cleverly distanced from this group and positioned in relation to it. Similarly, Alain Delon's all too brief appearances tell a comparable tale. He is the Charlus whose eyes never rest from roving in search of boys, who touches up his make-up in the tea-garden in the Bois, yet who accurately predicts that Swann will marry Odette and that the result will be catastrophic. It is a great pity that this character was not allowed to proceed to his apotheosis.

Alternatively, Schlöndorff could have exploited the visual themes that run through Proust's novel, the emphasis on dress and decor, the comparison Swann imagines between Odette and a Botticelli drawing of Jethro's daughter, Swann's dilettante interest in Vermeer, Proust's in Ruskin, etc. But instead of the film being taken over by a visual style, it seems to have been taken over by a team of literal-minded set decorators. 'How clever,' you find yourself thinking as Swann lights up, 'to have found a period cigarette case.' 'How interesting that Odette is wearing a kimono—that must have been the *Exposition universelle* of 1882...' The decorative authenticity of this film is obtrusive and though such a remark may seem niggling when the sets are so splendid, it does point to the fact that the plastic and decorative arts are mere adjuncts here, whereas in Proust's novel they are a way of life.

Thus Schlöndorff would appear to have had an almost self-defeating determination to pare *Un Amour de Swann* down to its least interesting component, which is the progress of the affair between Odette and Swann. As if to emphasise the constriction, this is shot for the most part on two sets of their respective houses (nicely contrasted), with only the odd exterior sortie into the still presentable bits of Paris (Place de l'Opéra, Place Vendôme, Place de la Concorde). Moreover, I suspect that certain key episodes only make sense to those who have a passing acquaintance with the novel. For those who do not, Swann will seem merely childish when he clambers through the back gardens to spy through the lighted window of what he (wrongly) believes is Odette's house, and positively outrageous when he tries to make her own up to earlier lesbian relationships. It is my guess that without the narrator's inexorable analysis which lends them a kind of naturalness, these things seem entirely perverse and even arbitrary. Moreover, the absence of

the omnipresent narrator has other debilitating effects: the film lacks, as a result, a device to distance the events related in the way they are distanced in the novel. There is therefore nothing to explain why they are the object of such obsessional distortion. The immediate realism of the cinema prevents the functioning of the filter of memory on which Proust's novel depends, and when this dimension is lost what remains is banal.

With *Coup de Grâce*, *The Tin Drum*, *Young Törless*, Schlöndorff proved himself not just a great adaptor of novels, but a great film-maker. And each of these films was, in its way, a period piece, so that there is no *a priori* reason why *Un*

Amour de Swann should have proved intractable. But each was also rooted in a particular cultural experience, whereas the present film probably suffers from a deliberate internationalism in the selection of cast and crew. It is particularly unfortunate that both the principals are dubbed, even though it is obvious that Jeremy Irons as Swann spoke his lines in French. No doubt if Visconti had realised his Proust project he would have transformed it into a splendidly grandiose epic like *The Leopard*. Failing this, Schlöndorff's mistake, it seems to me, is first to have adapted only part of the novel and, having done so, to have treated it in intimist fashion, where

it is bound to fall short of its literary original, rather than as part of a broader canvas.

A final word on the production. Like *Danton*, *Un Amour de Swann* has benefited from a direct financial contribution from the French Ministry of Culture. If, as it would increasingly appear, these subsidies are to go to established directors, working with established actors, and from works whose reputation is established, then the venture would not seem calculated to foster the innovative in French cinema. If memories are made of this, Simone Signoret was right to lament the passing of good, old-fashioned nostalgia. □



A nos amours: the unhappy Suzanne (Sandrine Bonnaire).

She who gets slapped

A nos amours/Gilbert Adair

Unhappiness, to coin a maxim, often derives from nothing more than the fact that we do not possess *precisely* the kind of happiness we might wish. As with most of Maurice Pialat's protagonists, Suzanne in *A nos amours* (Artificial Eye) is unhappy. Even when sanguine, she has a baffling capacity for radiating unhappiness around her, like those people who carry the condition within them like a disease, infecting others without suffering its effects themselves. Nor are we made privy to any latent causes for unhappiness in her nature. She is pretty, intelligent in a teenager's sulky, incommunicative manner, surrounded by chums of both sexes, wooed by an attractive though rather doleful youth and patently, if very maladroitly, worshipped by her parents and elder brother.

Furthermore, Pialat has set his film, to begin with, in the South of France (where Suzanne is seen performing Musset's *On ne badine pas avec l'amour* in the open-air theatre of a summer camp), and its lighting makes such flattering use of the warm afterglow characteristic of

Mediterranean evenings that, as in so many French films, youthful love-making appears to register principally as the mating of two tans; then, later, in some provincial town in the North, with the shivery premonitions of autumn tempered by another afterglow, that of all those double-coat suntans displayed by a *jeunesse* now literally *dorée*. He even enshrines her in one of the most dazzling credit-title sequences it would be possible to envisage: standing on the prow of a yacht, her back to the camera, her summery white frock delineating a pair of delicate shark's fin shoulder blades, to the accompaniment on the soundtrack of Purcell's 'The Cold Song' sung by the German countertenor Klaus Nomi (a rare instance in Pialat's work when the beauty of his *mise en scène* is offered neat—as one says of whisky).

Yet, in spite of these advantages, so to speak, Suzanne, one of the cinema's unlikeliest *femmes fatales*, remains a disruptive, almost subversive, presence. And how she pays for it! When she disobeys her father, she is brutally

slapped. When she sports a vulgar miniskirt, slap! When she taunts her brother for his homosexuality, slap! When she talks back to her mother, slap! slap! slap! In fact, slaps constitute the organising principle—the leitmotif, I suppose the word must be—of the film (along with sobs, screams and the tearing out of hair); and poor Suzanne is gradually moulded, sculpted, by them. These scenes (on occasion somewhat mechanically juxtaposed with interludes of domestic harmony—for, though a beautiful and moving film, *A nos amours* is also an imperfect one) are genuinely frightening, none more so than when, towards the end, Suzanne's father (played by Pialat himself) makes an inopportune reappearance in the household which he abandoned.

After haranguing his family and their dinner guests (and what he has to say, of only marginal import to the film's narrative drive, sounds very much like Pialat getting a few grievances off his own chest), he is suddenly slapped by his incensed and long-suffering wife. Even if one had not been enlightened by a couple of published interviews, one might well have surmised both from its violence and the expression of pained stupefaction on Pialat's features that this particular slap was unscripted, unpremeditated and in all likelihood administered by the actress Evelyne Ker to her director, rather than by one of the film's characters to another.

Pialat's films are not psychodramas (both performers, though visibly consumed with rage, succeed in playing the scene out in professional fashion). Instead, it is probable that Evelyne Ker began, like any mere spectator, to suspend her disbelief. She began to *believe*. Whether as Maurice Pialat or as her 'husband', she had come to loathe the man, and the character's natural reflex—schizophrenically usurping the actress's—was to slap him in the face. The supreme virtue of Pialat's cinema is this faculty for inspiring belief. *A nos amours* has, as I suggested, its share of flaws, mostly lapses of memory—an over-extended preliminary section, a slew of narrative loose ends, a persistent reluctance to impose any truly dramatic

continuity on the course of Suzanne's self-destruction—but, given the sense of utter conviction which it manages to generate, they cease to matter. This is due in no small degree to the performers, most remarkably Sandrine Bonnaire as Suzanne (her failure to gain an award at the Berlin Festival was scandalous), Pialat and Dominique Besnehard, as the brother who becomes more and more effeminate throughout the film until, during the climactic dinner party, we discover that he is married!

But there is something else. Pialat's personal reputation is that of a difficult, contentious man, who has been accused more than once of misogyny and once (by an otherwise sympathetic critic from *Cahiers du Cinéma*) of deliberately provocative anti-Semitism. Whatever the legitimacy of these charges, there is no question but that his films are informed with a vein of reactionary

pessimism, similar, if in a minor key, to that found in the novels of Céline (whose two jet-black masterpieces, *Voyage au bout de la nuit* and *Mort à crédit*, are conceivably the only works of literature which Pialat might be tempted to adapt). And what makes them so poignant is that, as an artist, Pialat has perhaps been saved by the cinema—which is to say, saved from a Célinian despair and outpouring of bile by a medium which, dealing with human beings instead of with words, is not easily conducive to hatred.

Thus the ending of *A nos amours* should not be read as wholly pessimistic; and discarding one's illusions, as Suzanne does, is not quite the same thing as being disillusioned. For (concluding, as I started, with a maxim) as we grow older, we are left with fewer causes for hope or happiness, but fewer of those left to us turn out to be illusory. □

'In the World'

The South/John Pym

One cold dawn in 1957, in northern Spain, in a house outside and separate from a nameless walled town, the adolescent Estrella awakes to the anxious voices of her mother and the maid. Her father, a doctor, has again disappeared. He has not, however, forgotten to say goodbye. Beneath her pillow, in a small box, one of those in which children preserve their special treasures, she discovers the chain and weight he used for water divining. Once, seated on this same bed, the doctor, Augustin, had suspended the weight over his wife Julia's stomach and divined the sex of Estrella, their only child. The parting gift—for, having finally found his unhappiness insupportable, the doctor has shot himself—brings with it, however, a responsibility.

The meaning of the responsibility which the father has placed upon his daughter is the subject of *The South* (Contemporary), directed by Victor Erice and scripted by José Luis López Linares from a story by Adelaida García Morales. Augustin's unhappiness is many-sided. The Civil War, that old wound, has divided him from his father. Julia, a fellow Republican, has been barred from teaching. Somewhere in the past there was another woman. As Estrella prepares for her first communion, her father vents his disapproval by standing on a hillside and loosing off the shotgun which he will later use to take his own life. He bears it all with silent, melancholy fortitude: Omero Antonutti, sad-eyed, grizzled, passive, has, it seems, absorbed the character into his bones.

The South is on the face of it a recollection of childhood by a grown-up Estrella. But its tone is that of her

father's character, controlled, distant and unspeaking. The seasons pass before our eyes: the ice melts in a few moments from a seagull weather vane; the child Estrella bicycles away down a long avenue of trees with a puppy running behind her; she bicycles back a teenager, the puppy a dog. This, like Augustin's life, is despite the changes an unchanging time. Flat shots of his house, the provincial hospital where he works, the walled town with its river beside which he is to die, seal Augustin's confinement. His daughter, whom he loves, and whom he makes a partner in his water divining expeditions, those single moments, perhaps, when he is able to escape from that island of the mind on which the history of his country as well as his own character has marooned him, observes all with a similar detachment. Inside a Havana cigar box is Estrella's collection of postcards: Seville, gypsies, Moorish delights, that other country, the warm south.



The teenage Estrella (Iciar Bollan).

The melancholy observation is, it must be said, subtly and beautifully achieved and with a precise attention to pace. The character of the house, and that of the life within it, for example, perfectly encompassed in one brief unemphatic scene in which the child Estrella (Sonsoles Aranguren) is told by her mother not to disturb her father who is at work on his 'experiments' in the attic. The girl tiptoes up the stairs in clumping shoes and listens at his door, but she lets slip the ball she's holding; it bounces, irrevocably, down the steep uncarpeted stairs; her father is too abstracted, one imagines, to be bothered, but her mother, the ever-faithful protector of this man she cannot understand, swiftly appears to scold her.

Augustin is made to feel the separation from his southern roots, the unresolved loss of his former love, most acutely, not by the monotony of his daily existence, but by the rare moments of vivid colour which are injected into it. His mother, a reserved lady who can nevertheless chide him for the beard which makes him look older than he is, and the plump jolly Milagros, who looked after Augustin as a child, pull up one day in a motorcar for Estrella's first communion. 'And now go to your parents,' the priest commands, his duties finished; mother and grandmother are filled with pride, Milagros is in tears, Estrella is radiant and there lurking at the back of the church is her father, whose plight young as she is she understands, and whom she playfully orders not to go away even if he's bored. After the ceremony, at the end of a celebratory meal, the family, as momentarily united as it will ever be, watches as Augustin dances with his daughter to the tune of 'En el Mundo' ('In the World').

Victor Erice, as he proved in *The Spirit of the Beehive*, is a man capable of intense sympathies. Here he sympathises, without a shred of sentimentality, with all his characters: Augustin; Estrella; the aristocratic mother, at heart no less pleased to see her son than her granddaughter (but in the latter case able to express her affection); the puffed Milagros, voluble, perceptive, indiscriminately affectionate; and Julia, who supports her moody husband with never a word of reproof: they have been through things which, like all life's deepest hurts, are beyond words. The household, like all real households, is held together by invisible bonds: Julia is comforted by her books (*Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, *Wuthering Heights*) and is quietly pleased to supervise Estrella's copybook exercises: one is made to understand, with only a touch or two, how she has survived. Estrella has an ally in the maid: their intimacy is underlined in a small scene where the latter half-teasingly, half-shyly writes in the flour spread on the kitchen table what Estrella's tiresome boyfriend has written on the wall of the house. Deepest

of all, however, is Erice's sympathy for the girl as she struggles to understand Augustin's heart.

Augustin also wishes to understand his daughter, his hope for the future, but, growing up, she becomes preoccupied with other matters—even the tiresome boyfriend takes time and telephone conversations to put off. The chain and the weight no longer draw her to him: that will only come later. With despair about to overwhelm him, he makes a final effort, takes her, on a schoolday, out to lunch at the town's Grand Hotel. They are the only diners. A waiter, an older man, uneasy at having so little to do (and Erice effortlessly opens a window on another life), hovers attendance. In an adjoining room a

wedding party is in full swing. Father and daughter do not somehow hit it off; she asks about Irene Rios, his former love; he cannot bring himself to tell her. She has a French class; he begs her to stay; she can't. He has a second brandy with a mock apology. As she leaves, he toasts her. The camera pulls up, peeps over a curtain, the newlyweds are dancing to 'En er Mundo.' Next day Estrella wakes to her mother's anxious voice and the gift beneath her pillow. Among her father's effects is the receipt for a long-distance phone call: perhaps to Irene Rios. Invited south by her grandmother's family, she may discover to whom her father spoke on the night of his death. The reconciliation, which will end in this film, has begun. □

is similar in that its own art is neither stylistically consistent nor very easy to come to terms with.

Artlessness—in what is thought of as the typical Cassavetes style of giving actors plenty of behaviour to work on and audiences no characters to relate to—predominates in the relationship between Robert and Sarah Lawson (Gena Rowlands). This central duo is not brought together until some time into the film, after their separate lives have been established: Robert conducting 'research' for a book on night life by haunting clubs and hiring troupes of girls to stay in his house; Sarah trying to hold on to her family through the divorce courts, though it is her overweening love that has brought her and her husband Jack (Seymour Cassel) there in the first place. When Robert and Sarah finally get together, Cassavetes refuses for a while longer to let on that they are brother and sister. The point being that they should exist first as people rather than characters, though at the risk of obscuring the theme, which is the need for family.

What is interesting, however, is the very obvious 'art' which contradicts this rawness and shapelessness. One early sign is a single shot of Sarah, having been ordered to Europe by her psychiatrist to find the sex that will restore balance in her life, struggling behind a high mesh fence with a mountain of baggage. In that one bare room, and Sarah's Sisyphean labour to shift her luggage from one place to another, is encapsulated her experience of a continent (and the failure of the psychological rescue mission). Later, in a conversation with Robert, she muses over whether balance is something that might be found in art—cooking, perhaps—since the love that she has otherwise channelled into an obsession with her family has simply overwhelmed its object.

Robert stands on the other side. He has his art, and one which, like Sarah's life, seems to revolve round the poles of love and loneliness. His imbalance is also the mirror image of hers, too much 'research' into love, too much semblance of family without emotional commitment: his mutable ménage of companions, his curious liaison with a singer (Diahnne Abbott) which is diverted into dalliance with her mother. The symmetry of brother and sister has its formal echo in the way lines of dialogue pick up on the lyrics of the songs cleverly used throughout, and in the way that it is Sarah, rather than Robert, the writer, who uses fantasy to project out of and resolve her problems. Robert is most deviously Prospero-like in what he has renounced, if not his 'magic' then any direct connection with its source. As he declares at one point: 'Love is dead. Love is a fantasy little girls have.'

Love Streams may not be a summation, but it is something closely related, a kind of Cassavetes compendium. Sarah and Jack's marriage could be seen as the



Love Streams: Sarah (Gena Rowlands) with her menagerie.

Cloud-capped towers

Love Streams/Richard Combs

A thematic correspondence couldn't, reasonably, be made out of a clutch of chickens, a goat, and a storm that satisfyingly washes everything together. And one wouldn't want to suggest that *Love Streams* (Cannon) stands in the same relation to John Cassavetes' work that *The Tempest* does to Shakespeare's. But the coincidental resemblances—like the livestock and the weather—are teasingly suggestive. As is the fact that, in his second, usually separate career as an actor in other people's movies, Cassavetes recently played Prospero in Paul Mazursky's *Tempest*. And it is no more than suggestive, perhaps, to take the big plunge and say that Cassavetes' own character in *Love Streams*, Robert Harmon, a disgruntled writer marooned in his luxurious castaway pad in the greater isolation of Los Angeles, is as much a modern Prospero as Mazursky's island-hopping hero. *Love Streams*, based

on a play, even preserves a closer generic connection to Shakespeare, provoking the hero in his theatrical solitude with a stream of unwelcome visitors, not ill-assorted castaways but yellow cabs which glide up and down the Harmon drive. 'Who the hell is that?' he bellows in final exasperation at the pair of headlights that sweep decisively out of the murk of the climactic cataclysm.

But the point of this comparison is not to lend dramatic grandiloquence to *Love Streams*, just to turn it out of the usual glare of Cassavetes criticism, pro and con. To see it as something other than an indulgent vehicle for performers, an Esalen-like thrashing of emotions, and an opportunity for a director, reputedly 'difficult' when acting for others, to prove how difficult he can be by needling fellow performers and audiences alike. *Love Streams* is not, à la *The Tempest*, a meditation on the art of its author. But it

pairing of *Minnie and Moskowitz* thirteen years later with the roles reversed: Cassel's Moskowitz has shrunk while Rowlands' Minnie has burgeoned in emotional need. Or it might just be the same needs and failings expressed differently. Part of Cassavetes' jagged emotionalism is that each moment is an ugly-duckling chrysalis of the next. Sarah might also be a continuation of *A Woman Under the Influence*, except that the film is not hers, the context of her inappropriate emotions is no longer the emerging ambience of women's lib/social madness theory (let alone the clearer social setting of the earlier film), but her brother's renunciation of feeling. It is Robert's saturnine mood that keys the style of the film, the sense that, if not exactly minimalist, it is more pared-away than Cassavetes' reputation would lead one to expect. And at this end of the spectrum, Cassavetes' art is not only akin to *The Tempest* but includes the genre stylisation of *The Killing of a Chinese Bookie*. Robert Harmon could easily slip into the world of that film (blood, surprisingly, streams as easily as love here). Like Ben Gazzara's gambler-huckster-loser hero, he very much belongs to the divided world of *noir* mythology, moving between night and day as though they boded as much in the affairs of men as Shakespearean seasons. □

Overture only *And the Ship Sails On* Julian Jebb

The opening sequence is like an allegory of the creation of the world in terms of cinema. The first images we see are silent, flickering, sepia shots of a port. Figures scurry about with that self-importance which the overcranked camera emphasises. One man in a straw hat with a foolish excited expression edges into the foreground and stares at the camera for a second before he is yanked out by an unseen hand, as if Adam had arrived in Eden too early, and has to be temporarily disposed of by a minion of the Creator. But a few seconds later he is back, aware of his naughtiness but entranced—is it by the machine that is recording him, or is it perhaps the anticipation of seeing himself later, magnified and mirrored on a screen? He is just as speedily removed again.

Cars arrive, one of them a plumed hearse; elaborately dressed mourners begin to seethe beneath the shadow of a gigantic liner. Gradually faint harbour noises mix with a single instrument, and miraculously, and at first faintly, colour seeps into the picture as the passengers embark. Soon they are singing Verdi in full-throated abandon as they climb the side of the ship. Then, faintly swaying among the potted palms in the spacious

deck lounge, they sing on—full of anticipation and fervour in a room the colour of meringues and tangerine water-ices. They are noble in their passion and dedication, and quite absurd, like pieces of charcoal-coloured *tagliatelle* in their vanity. This is as masterly a sequence as Fellini has ever given us: playful, absorbed, delighted by the antics of his frivolous characters.

The carnival spirit of an adventure embarked on is sustained for the first quarter of an hour of *And the Ship Sails On* (Gala) when Orlando, a benevolent tipsy journalist, charmingly played by Freddie Jones, introduces us to the statesmen, singers, musicologists and lovers who are sailing to the Adriatic island of Erimo where the ashes of Edmea Tetua, the world's greatest soprano, are to be scattered on the sea.

Early on two ladies dressed in exquisite mourning saunter the biscuit-coloured expanse of deck. The sky and the sea are made of some material which is neither water nor air, and in the sky a pale circle of light is suspended. One of the ladies remarks how like a painting it is—which is exactly what it is. The world of ravishing artifice which the characters inhabit is thus straightforwardly stated in a charming, slightly unnerving joke. It is as if the audience is being warned not to bring anything but aesthetic judgment to the events and scenes which will ensue: to ask any moral responsibility of these obsessed and frivolous creatures would be to indulge in fruitless censoriousness. It is equally clear what Fellini is celebrating: the vitality and dreamlike inventiveness of early cinema and the grand frivolities occasioned by the operatic profession. The artificiality of both these enterprises is to be regarded as a delightful essential to the pleasure they give us as art.

But apart from flirting and rehearsing the requiem which is to accompany the last rites of the Diva's ashes, there is not much to do on board the liner, as filmmakers in this genre have discovered in the past. There is a strong risk that not only the characters on screen but the audience watching them, will become quickly bored without a murder, a mutiny or a catastrophe. Cinemagoers with a good memory will recall expressions of glacial ennui on the faces of Barbara Stanwyck and Clifton Webb as they were waiting for the iceberg in *Titanic*. Fellini tries to solve the problem in the same way as the Marx Brothers did on board their transatlantic liner in *A Night at the Opera*: the actors must provide their own diversions, which in turn will entertain the audience. Thus the singers, furred, feathered and elaborately hatted, descend to the bowels of the ship where they stand at the rails of what looks like a gigantic, lidless tin can on the floor of which the boilermen feed coal to the engine. The singers let fly their highest notes in competition and to the rapturous applause of the workers.

Other notables repair to the kitchens and improvise an orchestra made up of glasses filled to different levels with liquid. They circle the rims of these glasses until they emit a strange lament, this time observed with approval by the kitchen staff.

In the state rooms, which look like the interiors of fabulously appointed cigar boxes, an epicene fan of the late soprano (Janet Suzman) plays little scraps of film of her while listening to her voice on a gramophone. Orlando the journalist attempts to gain an interview with the Grand Duke of Harzock, a hearty yet androgynous princeling who looks like a German playing card of the period. Meanwhile a green and sickly rhino pants for breath in a casually surrealist sort of way. None of these diversions add up to much, either for the passengers or the audience. Something has got to happen.

We are reminded of the date, July 1914, by the arrival on board of a large group of Serbian refugees in flight from Austria as a result of the assassination of the Archduke Franz Ferdinand at Sarajevo. Is this to be a 'harsh intrusion of reality'? Unfortunately, and up to a point, it is. These peasants, for the most part seen in prettily framed shots as they go about their business of being vital but put-upon unfortunates, are at first a source of annoyance to the spoiled passengers and anxious crew, but being peasants (and remembering, as we do, the one bad scene in *A Night at the Opera* when the steerage passengers dance and sing robustly) they know how to enjoy themselves. Soon they are dancing interminably with each other and eventually with the gilded artists. They are a fatally decorative lot looking far less out of place in the painted salons of the SS 'Gloria N' than they are supposed to. The film attempts, too late, to change gear, and to elicit our sympathy for the outcasts—but in the event they have less substance than the caricatures whose whims and tantrums we have grown accustomed to. The heavily symbolic finale combines the removal of the refugees to an enemy boat and the final performance of the requiem. The 'Gloria N.' is struck by a bomb flung by one of the discontented Serbs and it begins to flood. But we hardly care.

This is a sadly tired film from a great master. There is not enough invention and no substance whatsoever except on the purely pictorial level. In fact it looks as if Fellini, who has always worked well before with fantastic and elaborate decor, is here swamped by his designer, Dante Ferretti. The penultimate shot seems less like an ironic revelation than a desperate and facetious stunt: we are suddenly confronted with the studio floor filled with the film crew up to its tricks and the camera zooms into the eye of another camera... but we knew long ago that it was all artifice, and we don't need to be reminded again. □

Adaptations

Under the Volcano

John Pym

Wise Blood, taken from the novel by Flannery O'Connor, was a skilful small-scale literary adaptation: the story of a crazy preacher boy from Tennessee could have occurred nowhere else but in Appalachian country; the film had a pinched, strange and wholly particular look; Brad Dourif, the lead, did not come encumbered with audience expectations. The modest film, produced by Michael Fitzgerald and directed by John Huston, was startlingly attractive in part because it came unexpectedly, out of nowhere, an unrepeatable oddity. Glancing back over Huston's long career, however, the literary adaptation which stands out among the director's decidedly chequered recent projects as more authentically a Huston picture is *The Man Who Would Be King*. This is above all a yarn-spinner's yarn; Kipling's romance is copperbottomed. It was also a players' film, as many of Huston's best films have been. Sean Connery and Michael Caine, both unashamed stars, gave swaggeringly confident performances. Both were visibly enjoying themselves.

Under the Volcano (Fox) is a different kettle of fish altogether. Geoffrey Firmin, the ex-British consul of Cuernavaca, is in his own way as doomed as the equally self-destructive young preacher Hazel Motes, but Malcolm Lowry's subject and method of address has a very different sort of grandeur from Flannery O'Connor's, and one infinitely less adaptable. On one level, Flannery O'Connor's story is no more than what it appears to be: its meaning is its strangeness. Convey the strangeness, which Huston does with a sympathy for alien customs and alien places akin to Werner Herzog's, and you have the essence. *Under the Volcano* places an Englishman in a strange land, Mexico in 1938, but the strangeness of the land is on this occasion a means of offsetting the author's autobiographical ruminations on the disintegration of Western civilisation.

In Central Television's dramatised documentary on the tormented Lowry (also titled *Under the Volcano*), Conrad Aiken is heard composing a letter brimming with enthusiasm for his friend's purely literary skill in bringing the consul alive. Geoffrey Firmin, drinking himself inexorably and unpleasantly to death on the day on which all Mexico cheerfully remembers those already dead, is observed on his downward spiral by among others his wife, who had earlier abandoned him, and his half-brother, who had cuckolded him. He slowly emerges into wholeness thanks to a multiplicity of viewpoints. On screen, of course, he simply lurches fully formed



The consul (Albert Finney).

into sight. This is a long-awaited, prestige literary adaptation (several other film-makers tried but failed to film it) and many viewers seeing Geoffrey Firmin for the first time, it must be anticipated, will have burdened him with many pieces of literary luggage not wanted on this voyage.

Albert Finney plays the part of the consul, a man who has reached that extremity of alcoholism where he can no longer get drunk but must nevertheless keep drinking in order to keep going, with something approaching virtuosity: he pulls out all his many stops. He is perpetually fired up, twitching, lurching, collapsing, rummaging for bottles. We first see him in evening clothes and dark glasses; a pie dog brings up the rear; somewhere along the line he has lost his socks. He might have been pitiable or despicable, but Finney makes him someone worth watching. He has a sharp tongue, even in extremis, and a strong will somehow to keep going; if that only, on occasions, amounts to extricating himself from noisy social improprieties and falling-down foolishness. Finney has the sort of roistering quality, though in a different register, which animated Caine and Connery as the two soldiers who founded their own cockeyed version of the British Empire and then, like Firmin, discovered it falling around their ears.

Under the Volcano is not, however, a yarn as Fitzgerald and Huston (who have teamed again) and their scriptwriter, Guy Gallo, a graduate of the Yale Drama School, should have known. The route though is lined with temptations. Hollywood Mexicans have a tendency towards

self-parody: their natural habitat is the yarn. Hugh, the consul's half-brother, is likewise a figure half out of a romance, a peripatetic idealist, who when the film opens is still surrounded with the aura of the Spanish Civil War and is dressed in the exotic paraphernalia of a gaucho—a rig which makes him look intentionally foolish, but which is also foolish in itself. As played by Anthony Andrews he trails the aura of *Brideshead* too. Jacqueline Bisset, as Yvonne, the wearily forgiving wife (she urges her husband to have a decent drink and not to pretend he doesn't need one by fooling with Hugh's quack remedies), is likewise half out of a romance: a cool dream woman, promising a forever unobtainable balm for the troubled mind.

In the Lowry documentary, a shot of Yvonne's high-heeled legs walking slowly and deliberately away from the camera with the end of a shawl trailing on the ground beside them returns repeatedly to haunt the writer's imagination. The story of the consul's last day, which ends with his death outside a brothel in the rain at the hands of some right-wing roughnecks who have picked a quarrel over a grey horse, is told with none of this fanciful dreaminess but rather with a Kiplingesque plainness. It is embellished with moments of broad if not barrack-room humour (they strike one differently in the book): a ride in a funfair rocket which causes the consul to lose the contents of his pockets; an incident in which he picks himself up from the street and insists in the British manner that he is quite all right when a fellow Briton (James Villiers) tries with dutiful effusions to encumber him with unwanted help.

Once or twice, *Under the Volcano* edges towards deeper mysteries. The moment, for example, when the bus carrying the consul and his companions halts in the country and everyone gets out to examine the body of a murdered peasant, whereupon those who have done the deed materialise out of nowhere. One feels, in the middle of this huge verdant landscape overhung with a leaden sky, with the grey horse standing patiently beside its dead master, and the decanted Britons suddenly rattled and reacting by shying from involvement in this sordid incident, a tremor of the coming war. But for the most part, sad to report and despite Finney's valiant efforts, the book has remained—as everyone must surely have known—an unbreachable rampart. The swaths of descriptive writing, the flashback structure, Lowry's tone of voice, this and much more which buttressed the virtually non-existent story have not found their way into the picture. And drunks, it must be said, however well played, have not the backbone (unless perhaps they be the captain of 'The African Queen') which Huston prizes. Finney's Geoffrey Firmin in the end is a man one would go a thousand miles to avoid. □

Brass tacks

FILM STYLE AND TECHNOLOGY: HISTORY AND ANALYSIS

by Barry Salt
Starword/£16

Dr Salt's book is first and foremost a history of movie style. Movies, meaning mainstream fiction features, with their associated avant-gardes and documentaries. He doesn't attempt the impossible, that is, a complete explanation of every aspect of film form (which would entail a history of everything, from high finance to how and why audience tastes change). His quarter of a million words concentrate on collective styles and their immediate means of production. Not tools and techniques merely, but what artists and craftsmen sought to achieve, or avoid, with what equipment they had to hand, or could persuade inventors to devise for them.

He outlines developments like optical printers, edge numbers, matte boxes, longer or nimbler cranes and dollies, faster emulsions, better viewfinders, lightweight cameras with registration pins. He tells us, for example, exactly when and with what model and make of camera it became possible 'to make hand-held shots with synch sound in 35mm filming, and the first tentative steps in this direction can already be seen in *The Black Windmill* (Don Siegel, 1974).'

But he never falls into the trap of technologism, which assumes that hardware dominates styles and ideas. He's equally interested in how styles precede, or ignore, or develop in the teeth of, what technology makes newly possible or thoughtlessly easy. And indeed it's fascinating to see Renoir contriving to do staging in depth in the 1930s, when French studios could offer only what was almost the shallowest focus in production history.

One result of Salt's researches is to show how much smaller, and subtler, the differences between auteurs are than the rather gross formulations with which 1960s auteurs were content. And when he applies his methods to Max Ophüls' style, he shows that, far from being avant-garde or unusually calligraphic, it was conspicuously conservative. It derived from the ordinary stylistics of German musicals from 1930-32 and Hollywood directors like Stahl. Conspicuous in later Ophüls' films are jump-cuts and reverse angle Dutch tilts, i.e. apotheoses of montage!

Where camera movements are

concerned, *Madame de* has its poetic 'secret', but it's much more refined than 'camera movements' *tel quel*. To develop Salt's comments a little, we could say that its sustained follow-shots maintain a certain fixity and distance, and generate a certain momentum; all this, in interaction with lighting, decor, acting and story, implies a sad yearning, dissatisfaction, enclosure, fatalism. All formal structures are highly ambiguous in themselves (whence the inadequacy of most existing formalisms); but each element of a film exists to be opened up, and impregnated, by all the others. In stressing Ophüls' artistic limitations, Salt glances at non-formal factors too, and in this respect he is one of film culture's very few true structuralists.

I've no doubt that practical and professional film-makers will find this account of past practices and problems deeply engrossing. For an authoritative second opinion I consulted MGM veteran and documentarist Maurice Rapf, who vouched for its overall reliability and its fascination. It's the first map, let alone history, of its field. It bridges that enormous and crucial gap between the Focal Press technical outlines (admirable as these are in themselves) and the best kind of art history. It plugs in to the same scientific psychology, logic and culture as Jean Mitry's *Esthétique et Psychologie du Cinéma*. This cultural convergence is of great importance for film studies, as they struggle to reintegrate themselves after debilitating attempts by semioticians to subjugate them to linguistics and hyper-politicised ideologism.

Salt's style is sensible and straightforward; he's one of those writers who's too clever to be difficult. He makes distinctions and reservations so swiftly and simply, and with so little false precision, that they seem quite obvious, until you think again. Or until you compare his approach with the extremisms which his opening chapters take to task: literary-based auteurism on one hand, so-called structuralism on the other. His syncretistic approach lays a solid yet flexible basis for something quite new in film culture: a comparative stylistics.

Accordingly, he's the first critic to formulate many of those fuzzy but pervasive issues that we all notice vaguely or locally, but then shelve 'for a while'. One example. He treats acting as a matter of film style. (And actors are indeed technicians whose hardware is their own bodies!) He raises his eyebrows at the way American silent movies combined widely different acting styles. Actors using the archaic, semaphore-like stage pantomime

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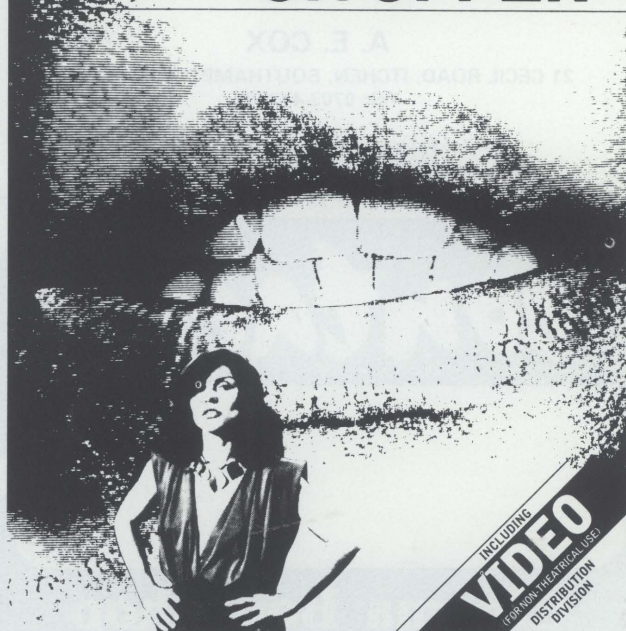
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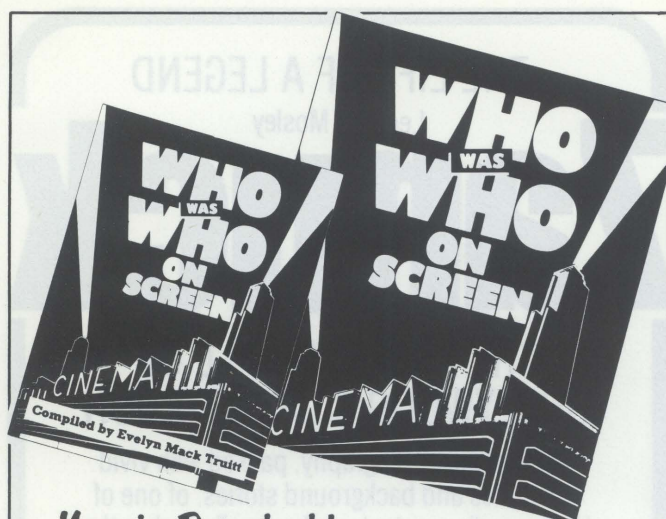
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—The Other Side of Show Business— BBC

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work cheek by jowl with others whose subtle naturalism would have impressed even the deadpan 40s. It's important, for stressing how varied film conventions are; how irregularly they change; how sensitively spectators readjust to 'local' norms, all of which 'bourgeois ideology' accommodates, but none of which it specifies or prescribes ('pre-scribes').

Salt's Scientific Realism, being solidly plugged in to Anglo-American philosophy of science and logic, equips him to be briskly scathing about the theories of Eco, Metz, Bellour, Lacan, Screen, et al. Film teaching, too, will have to accept his 'brass tacks' approach, where 'style' leads back to 'art', alongside its present, meanly negative fixation on selected aspects of industry practice, manipulation and 'stereotypes'.

Like all major works, Salt's thesis raises new problems. My copy's (wide) margins are festooned with questions, quibbles, hypothesis. But Salt is always clear, and his 130 frame stills show exactly what he means. The next move would have to be a tv series or video cassettes, where he could pinpoint movements, rhythms, continuities. As he has long been doing in his lectures at the London International Film School, many of which I've attended two or three times. Like the best movies...

RAYMOND DURGNAT

Weather unchanged?

**BEYOND BROADCASTING:
Into the Cable Age**
by Timothy Hollins

BFI/£5.95 (paper)

Variety had been assiduously reporting the amazing success of RCA's C.E.D. videodisks; but then, this spring, kerpflutz! Faced with absolutely no interest from the public, RCA was getting out of the videodisk business. The hype had been squeezed out by the facts.

Timothy Hollins' *Beyond Broadcasting: Into the Cable Age* is a bit like *Variety's* account of the videodisk. It begins with talk of the information society, forces of technology and the like and outlines the potential of cable systems within these contexts. Three hundred and sixty pages later it ends with news of North American cable difficulties and closedowns and the collapse of various British schemes before they even get off the ground. The hype has been squeezed out by the facts.

Along the way, Hollins does much valuable work. The Canadian experience, of which he offers a clear account, has long needed explication. The sections dealing with Britain are equally illuminating and even-handed. But, when it comes to the States, he does not hold the ring as between the 'blue sky' supporters of cable and its 'clouds of doom' opponents, despite his claiming so to do.

One gets the impression in the American section that he has failed to hear a similar range of voices to those reflected in accounts he gives of Canada and Britain. I say 'one gets the impression' because the book is almost without footnotes, a somewhat startling omission in a work copyrighted to the Broadcasting Research Unit. This is not 'pedantic wretch'ery on my part. In the world of us cable it matters who is making what statements about such things as audience size and production costs. If I am told, as I am, that the Weather Channel is watched by 40 per cent of its potential audience at least once a day for 15 minutes, I need to know who is saying that. If it is the A. C. Nielsen Company, fine. If it is the Weather Channel, my other leg is ready to be pulled.

Hollins' acceptance of the cable industry's agenda is reflected in everything he writes about America. He accepts assessments of the value of programme services uncritically, and seems to be particularly fond of the Cable Health Network, an interminable series of talking heads, interminably repeated and broken only by advertisements for quack medicines. He plays up problems with MDS and STV as newer technologies, because the cable industry is eager to be protected from them. He accepts one cabler's explanation of 'churn' (the rate at which people join and leave the system) and stresses signal theft, again reflecting cablers' predilections and opinions. He presents access, despite correctly identifying the importance of the National Film Board of Canada's pathbreaking series *Challenge for Change*, as an ahistorical phenomenon, unrelated to such issues as the cities' demands for control. So when he writes, 'Nor can a systems operator be expected to bear more than a proportion of the costs of access,' we hear nothing but the cablers' undistorted voice.

Most of all he fails to elucidate the complex figures involved in the business. Despite a lengthy section on demographics, he does not explain how cabling the inner cities, the only area of expansion left, will affect the cable industries' straightforward projections of continued growth and continued tv network erosion. He does not deal with the slowdown

in penetration for such services as HBO which might reflect a general levelling off. He accepts all the cable industry's hype about programme service costs and profits—including the statement that the CBS arts channel, which lasted ten months and produced 310 hours of programming, 70 per cent off the shelf, cost \$40m or an absurd \$1.3 million per programme hour.

But it is the book's tables which are the real hostages to fortune. He reprints my favourite, a comparison between the 25 shows available on my Manhattan cable system on 7 June 1982 at 9 p.m. and the comparable 3 in Britain. The 25 were, almost without exception, unwatchable antiques from forgotten archives, studio chat or repeats. In Britain, *Minder* was in competition with *The Hitch Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy*. Never mind the quality, feel the width. And what is a table of 'Potential average advertising per hour in primetime' (my italics) for two ad-supported cable services doing here? Why not print how they have actually done (poorly) rather than their upbeat predictions? Another table prints households reached, a pointless figure to anybody but cable industry puffers. For it matters not who can watch, it matters who watches.

And here is the rub. The cumulative ratings of these services is, as Hollins reports, minuscule. The latest figures give HBO only a 2.5 rating. This is not to say that when it wheels out *Star Wars* for the first time it will not do enormously better. But we are talking here of 'the bottom line'. Hollins obscures the relevance of this by uncritically reporting all available figures, even, on occasion, commenting on how unfair a statistic is to cable because not all homes are on the wire. A table which shows basic cable taking up 0.5 per cent of leisure time and pay-cable a mere 0.9 per cent is declared to be 'of limited value' because of this. Yet here is exactly the point. For example, Turner's all news service can be seen in 31 per cent of the nation's TV homes, yet it has a cumulative rating of only 0.3. The truth is that virtually nobody is watching.

Hollins knows these things and, indeed, reports them fully, but his text is so cluttered with hype as to obscure their significance. In the late 70s the American cable industry was talking about a plateau at around 30 per cent of homes. This would be the launching point where the advertising-supported basic services would look like a serious option for Madison Avenue, and HBO would start to emerge as a fourth network. Any discussion of American cable which does not take cognisance of these expectations and the degree to which

they have remained unfulfilled, despite the 30 per cent figure being long passed, is suspect.

Beyond Broadcasting: Into the Cable Age by its very title sets the wrong agenda. Broadcasting was born in a cable age, and as Hollins, in another most valuable section, itemises, wired broadcasting has a long history. The only way to make sense of the field is to broaden it, to see cable as part of a total telecommunications system, playing its part but not dominating the scene. Such a perspective allows one to develop a third view, neither blue skies nor clouds of doom, but rather, weather unchanged—for that could well be the American outcome; and reports like this, which Hollins relays, should become part of history: 'According to an RCA estimate, the pay and pay-per-view industries could be earning some \$16.3 billion by 1990, compared to the networks \$13 billion.' RCA, eh! Weren't they the people with the videodisks?

BRIAN WINSTON

Polymath

EISENSTEIN AT WORK

by Jay Leyda and Zina Voynow

Methuen/£15.00

Of the making of books about and by Eisenstein there is no end. He himself not only made pictures, he experimented in film, theatre and opera, he taught. He was a considerable graphic artist and not only sketched sets and setups, costumes and characters, but doodled and caricatured mercilessly, not only others but also himself. He wrote about everything, especially artistic speculations, conclusions and methods. He wrote in Russian, English, German, French and Spanish—sometimes in scripts and letters all of them mixed, and even with Japanese added. And he had a sense of humour.

All over the world people discussed, worshipped, condescended, diminished or even partially understood him in scores of languages. Many of them wrote, still write, what they believed, or would have liked to. And this will doubtless go on.

It seems to be saying a lot, therefore, to assert that this new book of Leyda and Voynow will never be surpassed. From now on it will be indispensable to everyone especially interested in Eisenstein—therefore it should be available in any serious and comprehensive library of cinema. To justify this claim we should define the species. We should explain what the book is not and what it is. It is not the authors'

personal and conclusive estimate of Eisenstein's value, laying down the law. Anyway, such aggression is not Professor Leyda's style. It is not a compendium of Eisenstein's life and works from birth to death. Such a toil, at Leyda's standard of scholarship, could have required not one volume but twenty. Nor is it the answer to the prayer of the idle student, seeking to cram into an hour's easy read everything about Eisenstein needed to pass an exam without ever looking at an Eisenstein film. What it accomplishes is much more miraculous. It is to add something fresh and invaluable to the forever growing shelves on Eisenstein.

Nearly ten years ago a young German enthusiast named Werner Sudendorf produced a small paperback listing the events of Eisenstein's life by date (Carl Hanser Verlag, Munich, 1975). A labour of love, useful, but inevitably remote—with due modesty entitled *Materialien zu Leben und Werk*. What we have here is the fleshed-out skeleton, living, feeling, speaking. We have the stages of Eisenstein's life; boyhood, youth, civil war, Proletcult, cinema experiment, *Potemkin*, *October*, *Old and New*, the battles in Hollywood, in Mexico and back home, with

music, with talkies and at last with *Ivan the Terrible*. But here the two authors have been able to place each development (and each distraction) of Eisenstein's work in its context, with background history, conflicts and obstacles, new experiences, new countries, new people, aspirations, hopes.

One author attended Eisenstein's lectures at the State Institute of Cinematography and attended on him as he began *Bezhin Meadow*. Since then Jay Leyda has written the standard history of Russian and Soviet cinema that still, a quarter of a century later, is the envy of Soviet cineastes. His partner here, Mrs Voynow, who works in film in New York where Leyda now teaches, as a sister-in-law of Eisenstein and in frequent correspondence with her sister Pera Attasheva continually received stills, photostats of drawings, production news and anecdotes. The page size—9 by 11 inches—allows a plethora of illustrations finely produced and aptly placed: portraits, production stills, diagrams, script pages. Never again will we meet authors so equipped to bring his time, his colleagues, the people he met, the places he visited, his feelings so close to us.

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Invisible men

SIR,—I think it most unfortunate that the SIGHT-AND SOUND review (Spring 1984) of Dai Vaughan's *Portrait of an Invisible Man: The Working Life of Stewart McAllister, Film Editor* fails to convey what an enthralling book this is. I personally found it hard to put down, because both the detection work and the manner of its presentation are the more intriguing and impressive the more you know about the scene in which Vaughan was pursuing his research.

Vaughan's remarkable feat in making the invisible manifest is dependent not only on a rigorous examination of every shred of evidence, but also on the professional skill, far beyond the scope of most critics and reviewers, to identify the character-

istics of a film editor's work by simply looking at the films he edited. Additionally, the way in which Vaughan gradually unravels the mystery by juxtaposing quotations, facts, and visual passages (highly relevant descriptions of the building occupied by the Glasgow School of Art, or of the inside of a cutting-room, for instance) is uniquely that of someone with an outstanding dual talent as both writer and film-maker (albeit in the invisible role of editor). Far from presenting Stewart McAllister as anything like an 'alter ego' of himself, Vaughan's achievement is to have put all his own experience and gifts into a projection of his subject which is undistorted and entire—the art of film editing *par excellence*.

Not content with ignoring all the exceptional qualities of Dai

Vaughan's book, your reviewer wrote, 'it would have been most interesting to learn about McAllister's relationship with Grierson. As the unit's first-string editor, he handled the detailed daily execution of Grierson's overall brief.' This needs correction because it is quite untrue. Grierson (as I was not the first to record) resigned from the GPO film unit in June 1937 and left for Canada, New Zealand and Australia as film consultant to the Imperial Relations Trust which was set up by the government that year. He then went on to found the National Film Board of Canada before and during the war, not after it as stated. Cavalcanti was in charge of the GPO film unit when McAllister joined it on 30 August 1937 in the lowly grade of 'stills assistant' (as Vaughan discovered from the Post Office archives). I know of no evidence that McAllister ever worked under Grierson.

Yours faithfully,
ELIZABETH SUSSEX
London N2

SIR,—In his review of *Portrait of an Invisible Man*, Robert Brown states that 'After the war Grierson went on to found the National Film Board of Canada'. In fact Grierson founded the Board in 1939, based on an Act of Parliament he had drafted for the Canadian Government the previous year. He resigned from the Board in 1945.

Yours faithfully,
BASIL WRIGHT
Henley-on-Thames, Oxon

Grierson on Burns

SIR,—In his review of Dai Vaughan's *Portrait of an Invisible Man*, Robert Brown asks about 'McAllister's relationship with Grierson'. This provides me with a cue which I now realise I have been awaiting ever since Dai interviewed me early in his research. Why Dai and I did not examine the common ground shared by these two men—who surely provided, the one the eyes and the other the ears of Scots documentary—was pretty certainly because we both knew they never worked together on the same film or indeed in the same unit. Yet it was true—as Robert Brown writes—that Mac 'handled the detailed daily execution of Grierson's overall brief.'

He didn't need to rub shoulders to get the message. Whether he was making simple educational films in Africa after the war or inspiring at British Transport Films some of the most beautiful soundtracks documentary has found time, money or inspiration to compose, Mac outgrew the need for the companionship of the cutting room and substituted the sights and more particularly the

sounds of the alternative society which Grierson and he had separately discovered—not without occasional mutual exasperation. People who write about people don't care for that kind of closeted elitism (and the feeling is reciprocated). But if you must get personal, Grierson knew how to do just that, and in a good impersonal cause. As witness the following extracts from his review in *The Living Cinema* (Spring 1957), a review which, in case you should be so obtuse as to think he was writing only about a film, he headed 'Better Good McAllister'.

'One of the pleasures of the last Edinburgh Festival was *The Land of Robert Burns*. I should have seen it before but somehow McAllister, its producer, was too modest to expose it to another Scot...

'The sad thing about Burns in Scotland is that so many have had a go at him and few have ever been greatly pleased in the result. Partly it is because nothing can ever quite come up to scratch when you are dealing with a national myth. Partly it is because Burns is at root a controversial figure. Some are not much interested in his so-called sins and think his affairs exaggerated and his drinking just incompetent. Some again are not even sure of him as a poet, when it comes to consideration of the longer wind. They allow *Tam o'Shanter* and much that was rich and roaring when it was good eighteenth century satirical stuff but shy at the lines that got away to a wonderful start and never far thereafter.

'In the circumstances it is a brave thing to do a Burns film at all and what is odd is that the way through the brickbats had been so easy after all. I think Stewart McAllister just walked on the water and was done with it... He trusted rightly to the landscape to evoke what Burns was talking about; and it was so lovely in itself that there was no harm at all in giving Burns not only the credit of it but the copyright of it too. Then again he re-enacted nothing to embarrass you with reminder of what romantic liars your parents were. The girls among the corn rigs were by an odd act of simple genius just what they looked to be, buxom and as blessed in it as you or I—and never mind Burns—could have wished for.

'It may be that the *Cotter's Saturday Night* sits a little heavily on McAllister. There is, here and there, homely get-together and an ominous word of prayer but one's decent feeling is that it is not so much remembered from Burns—where it was false—as from McAllister's old man—where it was probably genuine.

'Best deviation of all is the fact that the lovers' lane note is struck

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exclusively in longshot. It is not just a question of relieving you of the gratuitous and inadequate intrusion of the cinema into poetic imagery; it is simply a question of letting Afton for a sweet change flow as softly as the poet so specifically instructs...

'The Burns film in short has the great integrity of being what one honest fellow thinks Burns to be. It rests widely on the countryside that bore him and blest him and blesses us the more today for the voice it gave him. The film evokes the poet in time as you might find him today if you could get down to a river again or to the Spring again rightly and as you should. It is not about my love is like a red, red rose which is possibly a

more passionate concept than McAllister might think it seemly to indulge—and I am not sure he isn't right. It is only about the banks and braes that bloom and are bonnie before worse, sometimes all too sentimentally and melodramatically, befalls. That I find fair enough as not only within the competence of the cinema to do well but in this case to do with a quite moving sincerity. Better I say good McAllister than bad Burns—and this is Cavalcanti's favourite editor and my own favourite, if ever-innocent, Burns-lover at his best.'

Yours faithfully,
EDGAR ANSTHEY
London, NW11

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

MICHAEL CULLINGWORTH is researching Third World cinema and has a special interest in Turkey... RAYMOND DURGNAT lectures on film at the Royal College of Art. His publications include *The Strange Case of Alfred Hitchcock*... HAL HINSON is New York correspondent on books and the cinema for the *Los Angeles Herald Examiner*...

SHEILA JOHNSTON contributes to *Time Out*, *Stills* and the *Monthly Film Bulletin*... N. M. LARY is the author of *Dostoevsky and Dickens* and a recently completed study of Dostoevsky in Soviet Film... LINDA POLAN has appeared recently at the Bristol Old Vic in *Fred Karno's Army* and on television in *The Fainthearted Feminist*... ALAN STANBROOK is Arts Editor of the *Economist*... LESLIE WOODHEAD works as a producer for Granada TV.

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ON NOW

●THE GOLD DIGGERS (BFI)

Sally Potter's film begins by announcing its feminist theme in song, a warning about what lies in store for women when they go to the pictures or open a book. 'But then a man with a gun came in through a door, and when he kissed her, I couldn't take it any more...' But what follows, surprisingly and pleasantly, is not in hectoring vein but more a mystery and a quest, and full of seductive imagery in its own right. It is not an attack on images of women so much as a metaphor for the circulation and perpetuation of those images, which it compares to the circulation of gold in the financial capitals of the world. To support this binary structure, there are two heroines: one black (Colette Laffont), who tries to unravel the mystery of gold; the other the epitome of the white dream girl/movie star (Julie Christie), who similarly attempts an exploration of her own image. Their efforts to break these respective circles lead (literally and metaphorically) into uncharted terrain and dangerous waters. Mirroring the theme, the narrative also moves in circles, powerfully enough to begin with, but perhaps inevitably tending to spiral inwards.

●VARIETY (BFI)

A young woman, up against unemployment but no whiner, buckles down to the job of cashier at a New York porn cinema. Bette Gordon's handsome, decidedly unconventional feminist picture, from a story by Kathy Acker, appears to end just as its plot proper is about to get under way: our heroine turns sleuth and sets out on the trail of a gentlemanly racketeer who has introduced himself at the box-office. The film's subject, however, is a cautious examination of how pornography—unexceptional, designed for men, screened at the well-swept Variety theatre—has its effect on a sensible, clean-living girl, a pool-player quite capable of taking men at their own game. She is brought to the realisation that there are more layers than she expected to her own sexuality, and as a consequence develops a capacity for action (thus, her increasingly assured sleuthing). As a bonus, the men are by no means all bad hats. (Sandy MacLeod, Luis Guzman.)

AGAINST ALL ODDS (Columbia-EMI-Warner)

Starting out as a remake of *Out of the Past*, this overplotted thriller lacks any useful perspective on the original and finally lurches into would-be *Chinatown* territory. James Woods and Jeff Bridges do their effortlessness best, but Rachel Ward is hopelessly miscast. (Richard Widmark, Jane Greer; director, Taylor Hackford.)

AMITYVILLE 3-D

(Columbia-EMI-Warner)
The old clapboard house is up to its tricks again: there's an infernal buzzing in the attic and a sinister bubbling jacuzzi in the cellar. Credulous exposé journalist Tony Roberts is in residence, and the furniture hurtles every which way at the set-collapsing climax. (Candy Clark; director, Richard Fleischer.)

ANGEL

(Columbia-EMI-Warner)
A schizophrenic programmer from the post-Corman New World stable, every bit as divided as its eponymous schoolgirl-by-day/hooker-by-night heroine over whether to opt for saleable sleaze or sleeve-tugging social comment. Hollywood Boulevard is ludicrously overstocked with hearts of gold; a concerned cop and a repressed ripper pad out the cast list. (Donna Wilkes, Cliff Gorman; director, Robert Vincent O'Neil.)

THE BALLAD OF GREGORIO CORTEZ

(Mainline)
A Mexican, framed by fate and Texas lawmen, heads for the Rio Grande. Director Robert M. Young pins a fair amount of moral significance on this true story, but saves the day by a deft handling of the Western ingredients. (Edward James Olmos, James Gammon.)

CARMEN

(Curzon)
Carlos Saura's dance version of the currently ubiquitous story has dashing flamenco footwork from Antonio Gades, but the conceit of merging backstage and balletic dramas is somewhat trite. (Laura del Sol, Paco de Lucia.)

CROSS CREEK

(Columbia-EMI-Warner)
Pretty locations in the Florida backwoods, much guff about communion with the land and simple folk. Martin Ritt at his most gushingly lyrical in adapting Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings' autobiographical account of how she found her Artistic Soul. (Mary Steenburgen, Rip Torn, Peter Coyote.)

L'ETE MEURTRIER

(Premier)
Despite a narrative strewn with corpses, this flaccid adaptation of Sébastien Japrisot's thriller has, at two hours plus, been extended far beyond its natural life. As a *femme* (literally) *fatale*, Isabelle Adjani attitudinises to risible effect, and the film can only be recommended as a bloodstained travelogue of sunny Provence. (Alain Souchon, Suzanne Flon; director, Jean Becker.)

FOOTLOOSE

(UIP)
Generation gap stuff about a small Midwestern town where Bible-thumping elders have banned disco-dancing and the kids take action. Great credit sequence in the flashdancing mode, otherwise staid, verbose and embarrassingly modelled on *Rebel Without a Cause*. (Kevin Bacon, Lori Singer; director, Herbert Ross.)

GREYSTOKE

(Columbia-EMI-Warner)
Hugh Hudson leads his lank Tarzan (Christopher Lambert)

through picturesque jungle vistas before depositing him in the equally grand domain of his English stately home. Ralph Richardson, old Earl Greystoke, bids farewell sliding happily downstairs on a silver tray. Masses of production design cannot remedy the inconsequential longueurs. (Ian Holm.)

HARRY & SON

(Rank)
Generation gap feuds, an artist's struggles as a young man, an old man's despair at the fading (literally) of the light—this modest-looking domestic drama about a father and son is in fact bursting with themes. As writer-producer-director-star, Paul Newman serves them unequally, but *Harry & Son* is another idiosyncratic instalment in the family histories Newman has been compiling as a director. (Robby Benson, Joanne Woodward.)

LIFE IS A BED OF ROSES

(Artificial Eye)
After *Mon Oncle d'Amérique*, which drew its multiple narratives from the forbidding stuff of the behavioural sciences, Resnais' latest collage seems quite frivolously based, intertwining fairy-tale, comedy of manners and Feuillade-like fantasy. But the result is the same: a delicious celebration of imaginative possibility and narrative cunning. (Ruggero Raimondi, Vittorio Gassman, Geraldine Chaplin.)

MEHMED, MY HAWK

(Focus)
The Turkish authorities wanted nothing to do with this adaptation of Yashar Kemal's novel of corruption and brigandage in 20s Anatolia. It was shot in Yugoslavia, with a raft of English-speaking players led and directed by Peter Ustinov. Dollops of sentimentality and a curious offhand humour sit uneasily with the tone of moral fatalism. (Herbert Lom, Michael Elphick.)

MR MUM

(Columbia-EMI-Warner)
When her husband is sacked, Mum (Teri Garr) lands a swish job in advertising; poor Dad, weakly unable to cope with the domestic round, becomes a slob with a roving eye. A lame sit-com, produced by Aaron Spelling, breathlessly put through its paces by Stan Dragoti. (Michael Keaton.)

OVER THE EDGE

(Mainline)
The suburban early-teen backlash, punched home as intelligent exploitation by Jonathan Kaplan. In every dream-home a heartache, or, more precisely here, a bored kid aching for action. Chopper-peddalling, dope-smoking mousepack warriors finally explode the commuter complacency of their parents in a superbly emblematic rampage. (Michael Kramer, Matt Dillon, Pamela Ludwig.)

SECRET PLACES

(Rank)
Provincial girlhood during World War II in a conventionally conceived, disjointedly executed nostalgia piece. Nice playing, but

the effort of the period reconstruction seems to have drained away both budget and creative energy. (Marie-Therese Relin, Tara MacGowan, Jenny Agutter; director, Zelda Barron.)

STRANGERS KISS

(Enterprise)
The making of a 50s B-movie—modelled on Kubrick's *Killer's Kiss*—involving shady money and tangled passions, is the basis for a strikingly intelligent essay on the overlapping of on and off screen worlds. Humour and a darker *noir*-ish side are beautifully balanced. (Blaine Novak, Victoria Tennant, Richard Romanus; director, Matthew Chapman.)

TANK

(UIP)
Uneasy amalgam of situation comedy and Reaganite propaganda (military dictatorships can be benevolent) as a veteran army sergeant uses his personal Sherman tank (www surplus) to wage war on a corrupt Southern sheriff. (James Garner, Shirley Jones, G. D. Spradlin; director, Marvin J. Chomsky.)

LA TRAGEDIE DE CARMEN

(BFI)
The first of three filmic records (each with a different cast) made by Peter Brook of his simultaneously pared-down and inflated stage version of the Bizet opera, this is to the much-admired original what a scratched disc is to a live performance. Musically very creditable; but Brook's notion of subjecting his characters to the pitiless scrutiny of Fate is to zoom up their nostrils. (Hélène Delavault, Howard Hensel.)

UNCOMMON VALOUR

(UIP)
For Hollywood, evidently, the Vietnam War has at last 'come of age', i.e. joined all the other conflicts of man's history as suitable fodder for guiltless, upbeat entertainment. Gene Hackman, as the stoically anguished father who refuses to let his son languish in a Laotian prison camp, has begun to look increasingly like the 80s Dean Jagger. (Robert Stack, Fred Ward; director, Ted Kotcheff.)

WHERE THE BUFFALO ROAM

(Blue Dolphin)
Fear and loathing as black-edged farce: the 'twisted legend' of Dr Hunter S. Thompson, gonzo laureate, is given a few extra kinks by screenwriter John Kaye (*Rafferty and the Gold Dust Twins*, *American Hot Wax*) as the hippie hack hero traverses the dread Nixon years. Two-way political provocations filtered awkwardly but amiably through the dope-haze ambience of a Cheech and Chong movie. (Bill Murray, Peter Boyle; director, Art Linson.)

THE WIND

A welcome return engagement, courtesy of Kevin Brownlow and David Gill, of Victor Seastrom's 1928 classic with the imperishable Lillian Gish as the Virginian girl forced into marriage in the wastes of Texas. Carl Davis conducts the English Chamber Orchestra. (Dominion Theatre, 19 July.)

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